













**STUDIES IN  
WESTERN INFLUENCE ON  
NINETEENTH CENTURY  
BENGALI POETRY  
1857-1887**



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WITH  
**A FOREWORD**

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**DEDICATED,**

**WITH HIS KIND PERMISSION,**

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**SYAMAPRASAD MOOKERJEE, Esq., M.A., B.L.,**

**BARRISTER-AT-LAW, M.L.C., VICE-CHANCELLOR,  
CALCUTTA UNIVERSITY**

**IN HUMBLE APPRECIATION OF HIS LOVE,  
INHERITED AND ACQUIRED,  
FOR OUR GREAT  
MOTHER TONGUE**



## FOREWORD

**T**O-DAY the writer of a treatise on Bengali Literature does not need to preface it with an apology for the choice of his subject, and the vigour and variety of the literature of modern Bengal have been noted with appreciation and interest in India and outside. While there is so much of creative and critical activity in Bengal to-day, people do not usually think of going back to the beginnings of this literary Renaissance in Bengal, and Bengali poetry of the nineteenth century has not recently drawn the attention that it properly deserves. For the professional student of literature the history of the growth and development of any literary type is as interesting as the fully matured product, and Prof. Das Gupta has earned the gratitude of all lovers of Bengali literature by tackling this theme. He has taken us back to the generation which was gradually settling down to an assimilation of the literature and culture of the west after a period of hysterical revolt against orientalism and antiquity. The establishment of the University and the stabilising of the new education were the natural results of the efforts of pioneers like Derozio and Richardson backed by official support, and there can be furnished no better proof of the assimilation of this education than in the outburst of creative activity during the two or three decades following.

In estimating the importance of the foreign influence on the literature of the period and in tackling problems of comparative literature one has to be especially cautious in steering clear of the two extremes of a mistaken patriotism on the one hand which will not tolerate the idea of any Western influence and of a devoted Anglophilism on the other which will trace everything good in Indian literature to the study and imitation of English literature. If



the latter danger was more pronounced at the beginning of the century, to-day we are more afflicted with extremists of the other brand and Mr. Das Gupta deserves commendation for his balanced judgments unswayed by extra-literary considerations.

Another difficulty one has to face in attempting such a study is that the literary idols of a past generation rarely retain their position in the present and at times it appears hardly credible that they should have exercised the influence that they appear to have done. What Byron meant for the poetry-lover of a hundred years back we can have very little idea of and the Bengalee who then studied English literature with avidity and adoration traversed fields which are much less familiar now. In resuscitating those fallen gods of the mid-nineteenth century, in estimating the value of the various elements that went to build up the genius of Michael and Hem Chandra, of Behari Lal and Nabin Chandra, Mr. Das Gupta has successfully essayed a difficult task. For many of the present generation these are mere names and in a blind worship of the new and the new-fangled we are often inclined to consign them to an oblivion which they never deserved. One however who, like the present writer, clings in a sentimental fashion to the idols of his youthful days has good reasons to be grateful to a serious student of the type of Mr. Das Gupta for reminding this generation of the debt they owe to these great pioneers.

N. K. S.

## PREFACE

THE present essay is a critical estimate of the four major Bengalee poets of the last century—Madhusūdan, Hemchandra, Nabinchandra and Bihārīlāl—with special reference to the Western influence on their poetical thoughts. As far as I am aware, no systematic work on the subject has yet been done from the *interpretative* standpoint from which I have sought to approach it. It will not be presumption, therefore, for me to claim that the line of inquiry is a new one in the field of our literary criticism on this subject; and that, I may submit, is my sole apology for this attempt.

I need hardly emphasize here the obvious difficulties and dangers of an interpretative work, particularly in comparative criticism. Where it is a question of merely external evidence drawn from authoritative sources, there can be little room for controversy. But where subtle mental affinities and analogies—and these, of course, cannot be identified with “influences”—have to be proved, the element of probability necessarily creeps into the work. Differences of opinion are, therefore, inevitable in such a controversial matter. But they are quite welcome in an essay where conjecture aided, as far as possible, by historical and literary data must play some part. I have endeavoured, however, to read the poetry of the period as an expression of the ethos of our race-type modified by foreign influence. The æsthetic synthesis of the importation of foreign thought and the consequent reproduction of our past culture, has occupied my attention in this study.

Throughout my work it will, therefore, be seen that I have been anxious not so much to establish my thesis as to present a true picture of the whole situation. Within the limits of my knowledge I have

freely acknowledged our literary indebtedness to the West, and I have approached what I consider as the more sacred part of my work—the task of interpretation and appreciation—with reverence and solicitude. For this purpose I have tried to rid my mind as much of the bogey of foreign influence as of the idola of false patriotism.

How far my professions have been carried into practice it is not for me to judge. Each individual poet has been, as he should be, construed as a unit by himself evolved out of the inevitable fusion of two great cultures—this is mainly what I propose to work out in the following pages.

The bibliography at the end of the essay indicates sufficiently my obligations to the preceding critical literature bearing, directly or otherwise, on the subject-matter. It has been prepared chiefly for the purpose of facilitating reference to works used in the text and in the foot-notes, though it makes no pretence of being a complete bibliography on the subject of my essay.

In transliterating Bengali words I have followed, as far as possible, the method of international phonetics adopted by Orientalists for Sanscrit; and I am alone responsible for the translation of all quotations of Bengali poetry in the footnotes.

Lastly, I have to confess to the hard fact that the limits of space have not permitted at times the inclusion of sufficient historical details which, under more favourable circumstances, can be multiplied by subsequent writers on the subject. But I venture to hope that my modest attempt will be amply justified if the vast scope of the subject and its infinite ramifications, at least as far as they have been set out in this essay, serve to draw the attention of the serious students of Bengali poetry, and direct them, in course of time, to the discovery of accurate critical canon governing the treatment of a great literary problem

the bearing of which on the growth of our vaster national life for about a century and a half has yet to be fully realised.

Now it remains for me to acknowledge my indebtedness to Jaygopal Banerjee, Esq., M.A., Professor of English, Calcutta University, for the generous encouragement he gave me, and for some valuable suggestions he offered in the preparation of the manuscript some years ago ; and my grateful thanks are also due to Nirmalkumar Sidhanta, Esq., M.A., Professor of English, Lucknow University, for the Foreword he has so kindly contributed to the book.

Dated, Calcutta, }  
October 30, 1935. }

H. D. G.



*Naturam expelles furcâ, tamen usque recurret.*—Horace  
You may drive out nature with a fork, yet it will still come back.



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# INTRODUCTORY

## CHAPTER I

### THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND : A PRELIMINARY RETROSPECT

#### I

**T**HE history of a nation's poetry is essentially the measure of its emotional life ; but where this emotion is found connected to a foreign source, it presupposes for its growth a particular historical background. The descent of a rich literature does not necessarily spell disaster to the product of the soil. It lends, on the contrary, its peculiar colour and energy to its less fortunate rival. It is, indeed, the business of a progressive literature to migrate into unchartered seas of thought ; and it is among its merits that it knows how to open its 'magic casements', and discover fresh fields and pastures anew.

The problem of the essay stated.

The expression of the genius of our race-type moulded to a certain shape on the new anvil of Western ideas is, therefore, the problem to be studied here. The revolt against the age-long withering rule of customs and conventions over the Bengalee mind in every department of life and thought, the headlong preference of the racial psychology for anything new, together with its innate obstinate refusal to be a party to its own complete annihilation in favour of powers that be—this is the real history of our literature as of our society of the last century, more interesting and complex in its significance than the story of the Anglo-Saxons under Latin or French influence.

The proposition is, then, made up of two parts—historical and literary ; and as the group of our poets with whom alone we are concerned, is neither wholly English nor exclusively Bengalee, but an

amalgam of both, a receptive and yet dynamic personality, an account of their common mental heredity is as important for our purpose as the super-structure of enlightenment that they chose to build upon it.

## II

The ancient history of our race, with all its meagre evidence of facts, leaves no room for doubt that Bengal by herself can claim to have had a cultural

The dominant tendency of the racial genius of Bengal.

past. Her civilization, though not quite as old as that of Nineveh, Egypt or Babylon, yet justly excited the envy of the Aryans when they came to settle at Allahabad<sup>1</sup>.

Her achievements<sup>2</sup> in art, architecture and sculpture are expressive of a people capable of 'building like Titans and finishing like jewellers'. But her real genius is more manifest in her religions, religious forms and ceremonials, in Yātrās, Kathakathās and Ballads; in those floating legends, folk-tales<sup>3</sup>, nursery-rhymes<sup>4</sup> and Bāul-songs<sup>5</sup> which carry within their homely, if sometimes meaningless forms, suggestions of national life perhaps deeper than we usually suspect.

It is interesting to observe that the test of the peculiar susceptibility of our race to foreign ideas is that the glorious periods of our literature have always synchronised with the advent of important political changes in the country. A disturbance in the politico-economic conditions, of course, affects, in

1. "বঙ্গালার ইতিহাস" by R. D. Banerjee, p. 25.

See also H. P. Śastri's article on "Bengal, Bengalees, their customs, manners and literature."

2. See "Art of the Maurya period"—*The early History of Bengal* by F. J. Monohan.

3. See *A History of Bengali language and literature* by D. C. Sen, p. 774.

4. "ছেলে ভুলানো ছড়া" by Rabindranath Tagore.

5. "Bāuls and their cult of man", Kshitimohan Sen, *Visvabharati Quarterly*, January, 1929.

varying degrees, the current of every literature. But what renders our literature specially responsive to a cultural stimulus from outside is the nation's pronounced emotional life, and its inward love for appropriating things good and beautiful; so that every road here leads primarily to the ancient shrine of its pre-eminently lyrical genius.

Though much denounced as Paisāchi Prākṛita during the Hindu era, Bengali literature received its first recognition with the Pāthān rulers of the fourteenth century, and from that time onward its expansion had been continuing unabated. The native princes too, as a result of the royal patronage, helped in popularising literature, and thereby arrested the absolute supremacy of sanscritic culture with its deadening conservative influence on life and literature. On the more religious side of this cultural fusion, the result of the progress of Mahomedan faith is to be seen in the needed supersession of Śaivism by the popularity of the śakta cult which has contributed, in no small measure, to the volume of our poetry. Yet with the impatient ideologists<sup>1</sup> that we are, this did not seem sufficient, as it were, to conserve the old, multi-coloured edifice of Hinduism, nor favourable to the free expression of our native spiritual idealism. A new protestant church arose, by a curious process, on the Liberty of the Sahajiyā cult and the Fraternity of Mahomedanism. The poet of that movement was Chandidas followed by its prophet Chaitanya Deva. It was, indeed, a unique spell of spiritual fellowship, a glorious rapture in which the people were lost for more than a century. But as it happens in every religious movement, its fervour gradually decayed, or mingled itself into the rising tide of the Śakta cult. Through

Its expression in the preceding centuries.

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1. নব রে নব নিতুই নব

যখনি হেরি তখনি নব।—চণ্ডীদাস

Oh, thou art always new : and whenever

I behold thee, I find thee new.



all this religious flux, however, the tradition of court-influence on literature maintained its ground, and lasted down to the latter half of the eighteenth century ; and hence it is that the dissolution of the Mahomedan government, the ruin of the zemindars and the corrupt influence of the Mahomedan court upon the courts of the noblemen gave a death-blow to the healthy growth of our literature before the beginning of the English era.

But how different, in form and spirit, is the literary history that was made by Western education and Western administration ! How more comprehensive was the tone of Western liberalism than that of the its expression in the nineteenth century. Semitic ! How infinitely more stimulating was the critical influence of Christianity on the almost extinct life of Hinduism ! What a difference in aims and methods between the zealous proselytizing work of the two religions, Mahomedanism and Christianity—the one having nothing very new or conflicting to impart, forced us to cling desperately to the past, the other without having ultimately diminished our respect for Indian culture, created an atmosphere favourable to the many-sided development of our latent powers ! But the only levelling factor was not Christianity or its missionary activities. There was, in the background, the democratic basis of British administration with its manifest rule of law which negated all obligations to religion and to the society. The aristocracy of the Mahomedan rule, the aristocracy of the Brāhmanic intellect coupled with the pervading effect of the 'inferiority-complex' of Vaisnavic *Dasya rasa*—all these artificial factors with their far-reaching mechanizing consequences on life and society—had brought us, in every way, perilously close to the verge of inanition. And it was just about this time that a complete reversal of the order was ushered in by a comprehensive Revolt that followed as a result of the pragmatic character of Western education, of Christian morality working in

co-operation with the political and administrative democracy of the west.

### III

It will be seen that in certain important aspects, literary, social and political, the story of the last century in Bengal appears to be a repetition of what happened to England under the Italian Renaissance. But at the same time, Bengal had succeeded in evolving a distinct culture of her own, complex, variegated and dynamic. The element of foreign influence is, therefore, an interesting study both in itself and in its organic relation to the poetical genius of the race. Where it has been engrafted, as in the earlier verses of almost all our poets, it acts only on the surface ; where it has struck roots deeper into the genial current of the national soul, it has flowered in a new kind of poetry. From the standpoint of *ideas*, again, the century, may be sliced up into some marked epochs, though it is true that no period in thought-movement ever proceeds evenly by clocks and bells, and though the rhythm of universal thought is almost alike in every age and clime. So the four broad divisions given below have only a relative significance with reference to each particular period which has its own bearing on the growth and development of this new poetry.

I. Christian Era :—(Christian missionaries)—1800-1820.

II. English Education Era :—(Hindu College or Derozio)—1820-1830.

III. Reform or pro-Vedantic Era :—(Rāmmohan and Ísvarchandra Vidyāsāgar)—1830-1859.

IV. Neo-Hindu Era :—(Bankimchandra, Rāmkrishna and Bijayakrishna)—1859-1900.

The foundation of the Fortwilliam College (1800C) intended primarily for the training of foreign civilians

in native languages made it necessary for the Pundits<sup>1</sup> employed in its service to prepare Bengali text-books ( e.g. *Probodh chandrika* ) on European models already indicated by Christian missionaries. Dr. Carey and Serampore Missionaries. We are not concerned here with the literary activities, either in the originals or in translations<sup>2</sup> of the Pundits, Maulavis, and European Scholars in their individual or collective contributions to Bengali prose, nor shall we take notice of the polemical literature<sup>3</sup> that had requisitioned those foreign elements of raciness, vigour and accuracy which, added to classical dignity, were turned to such glorious account by Išvarchandra Vidyāsāgar (1820-1891), Akshaykumar Dutt (1820-1886) and Bankimchandra Chatterjee (1838-1894) at a later date. It is enough for us to observe that the anglicising effect produced on the cultivation of Prose also appears to have inspired, during the second half of the century, that mushroom growth of poetry which was often an imitation of, or adaptation from English originals<sup>4</sup>. The Missionary prose in Bengali was to

1. Mrityunjaya Vidyānākar, Rāmram Basu, Chandicharan Muni, Rajiblochan Mukerjee etc.

2. (i) Aesop's Fables translated by Tarinicharan Mitra (1803).

সদৃশ ও বীর্যের ইতিহাস। সকল লোকের হিতার্থে বাঙ্গালা ভাষায় তর্জমা করা গেল।  
.....or Anecdotes of Virtue and Valour translated into Bengali.....  
Serampore Press, 1829.

(ii) Translations of a later date—Robinson Crusoe, uncle Tom's cabin, the comedy of Errors, and Rasselas.

3. From the "Dikdarsan" published by the Serampore Missionaries in 1818 and the "Kaumudi" by Rājā Rāmmohan Ray in 1819 to "Timirdarsan" by Krishnamohan Roy published in 1823 a large though ephemeral literature came into existence propounding revolutionary ideas in social and religious matters. The advocates of liberal ideas showed an extraordinary enthusiasm in denouncing orthodoxy. This coupled with the drastic measures which the young Bengal were taking to upset the cherished ideals of the country, and the daily growing tendency amongst them to abandon their faith in Hinduism and adopt Christianity aroused a hostile atmosphere all around inspiring the orthodox community to take up the task of opposing the movement of reformation as it were with a vengeance. Many magazines and journals were started by the members of the orthodox community, the most noteworthy of these in the first quarter of the nineteenth century was the "Chandrika" (1821)—D. C. Sen's *Bengali prose style*, 96-97.

4. cf. Early poems of Hemchandra, Nabinchandra, Bihariāl etc.

have its direct counterpart in the imitative verses of some of our later poets, based on foreign models.

#### IV

The real impetus for the spread of higher secular learning came, for both sexes<sup>1</sup>, from the Missionaries who joined forces with some native reformers, though with different ends in view.

Missionary activities and British Government for the spread of English education.

The joint activities of David Hare and Rāmmohan Rāy resulted in the foundation of the Hindu College in 1817, the object of which was "the tuition of the sons of respectable Hindoos in the English and Indian language, and in the literature and science of Europe and Asia." The following year saw the establishment of the Serampore College by a zealous trio of Baptist Missionaries—Carey, Marshman, and Ward—whose aim necessarily was, as in their first edition of the New Testament in more than thirty oriental languages and dialects, the propagation of the teachings of Christianity. While the same motive had brought into existence another College by Alexander Duff in 1830, it is to be noticed that a constantly growing stream of "ideas", literary and pseudo-religious in character, readily found their way into the younger heads of the upper class, and the *bourgeoisie* of Bengal, as was discovered in the Education commission of 1882. These private enterprises soon attracted the attention of the Government. At the instance of Rājā Rāmmohan Rāy, then, a committee of Public Instruction was appointed in 1823 presided over by Macaulay whose over-enthusiastic minute of 1835 as Education Member to the Governor-General's Council definitely established the triumph "of instruction in European languages and Sciences through the medium of English." This was followed by a Government proclamation in 1844, which opened up prospects of respectable employment for those who did well at the final Examinations instituted

1. Vide "the History of Female Education in Bengal", Chap. VIII, of *History of Hindu civilisation during British Rule* by P. N. Bose, Vol. III.

from that year, involving "a critical acquaintance with the works of Bacon, Johnson, Milton, Shakespear etc". *Pari passu* with this education movement we observe, as an offshoot, the rise of journals<sup>1</sup> and clubs on English models. But the finding of the Official Despatch of 1854 by Sir Charles Wood was that the course of Instruction so far imparted drifted only towards non-vocational or literary side—a striking testimony<sup>2</sup>, indeed, to the inherent idealism of the race; and this lop-sided development was further accentuated by the University of Calcutta established in 1857 as a merely examining board.

In directions religious and secular alike, the soil was, then, in process of a too rapid transformation. But it is to be remembered that the introduction of English education through the missionary enthusiasm for the masses in Bengal served only to deepen the spirit of challenge, chiefly in religious matters, that was already in the air from the times of the great spiritualist Rāmprāsād. The skepsis of the last days of Buddhism, it may be recalled, gave way to the

Disintegrating influence of English education.

1. The "Gyānuneshun" (or the pursuit of knowledge) was published in 1831 by Dakshinarānjan Majumdār (1814-1876) and Rasik Krishna Mullick—two Hindu College students of Derozio. They also formed a club known as the "Society for the acquisition of general knowledge" in 1838, soon after the dissolution of the Academic Association of Derozio.

Some of the important journals of the time are noted below with their dates and editors :—

- 1816. Bengal Gazettee, ed. Gaṅgādhara Bhaṭṭāchāryya.
- 1818. Samāchar Darpan, ed. Marshman.
- 1819. Sambād Kaumudi, ed. Rāmmohan Rāy.
- 1830. Sambād Prabhākara, ed. Išvarchandra Gupta.
- 1831. Gyānuneshun ("The pursuit of knowledge"), ed. Dakshina Rānjan Majumdār and Rasikkrishna Mullick.
- 1842. Bengal Spectator (the first organ of the British India Society).
- 1843. Tattwabodhini ed. Debendranath Tagore.
- 1855. Education Gazette, ed. Smith (First edited by Raṅgalal).
- 1872. Baṅgadarśan, ed. Baṅkimchandra Chatterjee.

For a complete list see Chapter "সংবাদপত্র"—"বাঙ্গালী ভাষা ও বাঙ্গালী সাহিত্য বিষয়ক প্রস্তাব" by Rāmgati Nyayaratna.

- 2. See Lord Ronaldsay, *The Heart of Aryavarta*, Chapt. III.

paurāṇic faith in god and Brāhmins. Unfortunately this faith was made into a fetish with the spiritual decadence of Hindu civilization during the later Paurāṇic Age, and the hold of so-called religion over the society exercised by the Brāhmins was more thoroughly sustained by a set of absurd customs and prohibitive measures. Instances of such rules are found in Smṛiti, Skanda Purāṇa, and other authoritative works testifying to the vicarious and tortuous methods by which the Brāhmins used to exploit the resources of the subordinate classes. It was high time that many of these absurd laws vainly resisted by a succession of religious reformers from Chaitanya down to Rāmmohan Rāy now exasperated the people, when the missionaries of Serāmpore led the way to a wholesale revolt against the Śāstras. This spirit of challenge appears to have been a legacy of the later eighteenth century. School of Free-thinkers in France, for they also had effected a wide-spread divorce between ethical and theological interests as a protest against the spirit of tyranny, intolerance and cruelty of the Priesthood. We shall presently notice their influence on Rāmmohan's reforming activities.

The great *Kulturhamf* that began in the early years of the last century was due, in the first place, to an undercurrent of reaction operating against old orthodoxy, and then suddenly reinforced by the introduction of a new culture brought in by a group of Christian missionaries and native reformers, by English teachers such as Derozio<sup>1</sup>, and Richardson, and by authors of text-books, all of whom were influenced more or less by the tenets of the French Revolution. The educative influence of that Revolutionary element on a kindred psychology can hardly be over-estimated. The magic touch of that foreign power roused to activity a puissant intellect paralysed by the torpor of long slumber. Within the four walls of their home so long closed to all foreign intrusions they now perceived the play of a

1. See Rājñārain Basu's "সেবাল ও একাল", P. 33-34.

'glorious' light of freedom which flung them on the common street, and left them to rely on another hemisphere that had seemed infinitely superior to their own. That world appeared before them with all the glamour and romance of a new thing. Whatever was orient was regarded as old and worthless, and everything that came from overseas received their enthusiastic applause<sup>1</sup>. The orthodox customs of the country with the all-pervasive influence of the doctrine of "karma" behind them were run down by the cultured public, particularly by the rebellious students of the Hindu College<sup>2</sup>, and the slogan they raised was: "Break down every thing old, and raise in its stead what is new." The bond of social discipline slackened; boys alienated themselves from their guardians and parents, and sought the light of freedom. In place of the holy Gāyātrī they used to recite the Iliad in their prayers when they were forced to say them at all at home. To take all forbidden food and to declare that openly before the Brahmins and orthodox Hindus only to make them indignant was a standing joke with the student community<sup>3</sup>. The sentiments of Hume had been widely diffused and warmly patronised at the debating clubs and meetings of the Hindu College students. Their literary taste became as much vitiated and perverse<sup>4</sup>. For a time

1. Our fathers, the first-fruits of English education were violently pro-British. They could see no flaw in the civilization or the culture of the West. They were charmed by its novelty and its strangeness. The enfranchisement of the individual, the substitution of the right of private judgment in place of traditional authority, the exaltation of duty over custom, all came with the force and suddenness of a revelation to an oriental people who knew no more binding obligation than the mandate of immemorial usage and venerable tradition.....Everything English was good—even the drinking of brandy was a virtue, everything not English was viewed with suspicion. *A Nation in Making* by Sir Surendranath Banerjea.

See also page 11. "পুরাতন প্রসঙ্গ" by Krisnakamal Bhattacharyya.

2. See pp. 105-108, "রাস্তার লাহিড়ী ও তৎকালীন বঙ্গসমাজ" by Sivnath Sastri.

3. Rājnarain Basu's "সেকাল ও একাল", P. 32.

4. Vide Introduction to *Life and teachings of Kesavchandra Sen* by P. C. Majumdar.

at least the country of Raghūnandan relapsed completely into those vices of freethinking or, as it were, of Tāntrikism into which it had sunk during the decadence of Buddhism, with a defiance and a pride of fashion unknown in the past. The classes particularly affected by this influence, as it was in the case of the Italian Renaissance in England, were the aristocracy in whom the spirit of faith had decayed, and the University wits whose mind had been emancipated by the new learning. They all refused to be bond-slaves any longer to any code of Śāstras, in order that they might justify their existence as rational human beings equal in rights and privileges to the class which had hitherto been the custodians of their conscience in the society.

It would, however, be unfair to father upon the un-Christian David Hare, or upon the School of Derozio the whole body of agnostic thought—the inevitable child of Protestant iconoclasm—that was noticed in the educated youth of that age. There is enough evidence that the latter as a teacher in the Hindu College (1828-1831) was primarily responsible for the agnostic sentiments and unbeliefs that he induced in his College pupils through academic discussions<sup>1</sup> or public debate; and by practice and profession he succeeded in introducing the vogue of Byronism, or a general spirit of Wertherism in the enlightened audience. But at home, as it had been abroad, the century was marked by a religious doubt and scepticism as a distinct literary motif. And it is also to be remembered that during the fifties of the century the stream became wider swelled, as it then was, by the utilitarian theory of Mill through the scientific treatises and articles of Akshaykumār<sup>2</sup> and Íśvar-

1. The Academic Association was founded in 1828 by Derozio. Members of the Association : Rasik K. Mullick, Krishnamohan Banerjee, Rāmgopāl Ghose, Radhanath Sikdar, Dakshinaranjan Mukherjee, Harachandra Ghose, Rāmtanu Lahiri, Pearichand Mitra, Śiv Ch. Deb.

2. Prominent atheists of the time : Íśvarchandra Vidyāsāgar, Akshaykumār Dutt, David Hare, Derozio, Biharilāl Chakrabarty, Justice Dwaraka Nath Mitter, page 229, "পুরাতন প্রসঙ্গ"।



chandra in *Tattwabodhini* (1843) which, it may be said, served to contribute, in no small measure, to the tendency towards rationalistic realism<sup>1</sup> and catholicity of outlook that distinguished the subsequent decades of our literature.

## V

But the excesses of any movement even with truth on its side, generate an opposition, and so it was the common law of reaction against the indiscriminate attack of Christianity on Hinduism that brought about a return to Vedantism. For a Brahmin-ridden Society that had so long taken religion at tenth remove from the direct perception of God, a plea for the Adwaita Philosophy with its *Aporokshanubhuti* was only sound ; and where idolatry, caste and a thousand superstitious rites had almost killed the inherent freedom of the individual soul, there naturally came the call for a universal religion (1828) based on "one God, one humanity and one ever-progressive revelation." On the institution of unitarian christianity Rāmmohan fastened, not so much for supporting the divine authority of the Vedas, as for enabling himself to extend his vedic vision of the all-pervading presence of God in man ; and to that end he cut the ground of idolatry and its concomitant social evils with the sword of the French Encyclopædists. As a Benthamite utilitarian, however, he, unlike Śankara, was opposed to monasticism which was evidently not in harmony with an age of science. He was the first to recognise the mutual obligations of religion and society, so that rightly enough for this country, he set himself to the redemption of the former which was so closely associated with the emancipation of the latter ; and he was the first, again, to wake up to the bell that rang in the inevitable union of the home and the world. His position as a prophet of modern culture has been briefly

1. See page 277, "*Maharshi Devendranath Thakur*" by Sj. Ajit Kumar Chakrabarty.

summed up in the following lines : "He brought from the rich store-house of Hindu thought and experience new canons of criticism and interpretation, and applied them to the liberalisation of even nineteenth-century Rationalism and new social ideals that in stead of repudiating the claims of the unseen in the determination of the truth of the seen, which was a dominant note of nineteenth-century Illumination, filiated the deepest experiences of the religions and the spiritual life to the message of the social democracy of the French Revolution."<sup>1</sup>

Such was the type of the Rājā's Brāhmoism which the quintessence of three religions had inspired, and which his Pragmatism brought into being ; and though for a time it was supplanted by the more practical, if less universal, doctrines of his follower Debendranāth Tagore, its survival is clearly seen in the subsequent literature<sup>2</sup>, in the creed of the Theosophical Society,

Maharsi Debendra-  
nāth and the Brāhmo  
Samāj.

1. An Essay on *Calcutta and its place in the cultural evolution of modern India* by B. C. Pāl. Speaking at a meeting on the occasion of Rāmmohan Rāy centenary Sir Brajendranath Seal said :—

In the panorama of modern culture and civilisation three peaks stand out prominently. The first is represented by Rāmmohan Rāy. He was the harbinger of the idea of Universal Humanism. Though Voltaire and Volney had a glimpse of the rising sun of Humanism, they distorted the view by pitting the East against the West, and minimising and traducing Christian culture. Theirs was a militant humanism, as opposed to the Rājā's synthetic and universalistic point of view. It is interesting to note here that a third stage was reached on this line in the creed of Neo-theo-philanthropy conceived as a new love of God and man. The second peak is represented by Tolstoi and Gandhi with their gospel of passive resistance and non-violent non-co-operation. The third peak in this panorama is represented by the modern movement of scientific humanism leading to Cosmic Humanism. \* \*

While Rāmmohan Rāy was thus laying the foundation of the comparative method as applied to the study of Religion and Culture history, he made two profoundly original contributions of high practical import :—

(i) He helped to establish public education in India on the basis of real and useful knowledge, more particularly of defence and the application of science to industry.

(ii) He made a forecast of the future political history of India and her relation to Great Britain on plantation (or colonial) lines. Indeed, he would even welcome high-grade European settlements in certain parts the country as a tentative measure to hasten this consummation. But the march of history has annulled the practicability as well as the value of this suggestion.

2. See Chapter on Hemchandra Banerjee.

and in a somewhat modified form, in the Vivekānanda movement. We are not here to trace the history of the doctrinal changes of the Samāj. For the student of the larger currents of thought of the Century, however, it has some interest, if he would care to survey the course of its development from the Impersonal to the Personal, from the Abstract to the Concrete, from the mediaeval dogma of the Śāstras or the tyranny over individual conscience to the principle of universal love<sup>1</sup>. With Debendranāth, therefore, Śāṅkarite vedantism came into touch with individualism, and gave way to a Dualism. He could not, in the early stage of his theological life, accept the doctrine of Māyā, because of his reasoned conviction in the uniqueness of the Individual, in the reality of Pluralism as distinguished from Absolutism<sup>2</sup>. Between the two he drew a sharp line of distinction, thereby postulating the law of infinite progress in the universe. This glorification of the Individual is the main contribution of the Maharsi to the theology of the Samāj, and in this he correctly represents the spirit of his age. The three treatises he had written, again, show a gradual development in his theological opinions and beliefs. He was at first a dualist, because he believed in the personal immortality of the soul, and not in its Nirvana in the bosom of the Infinite. But in his "Interpretation of the Brāhmo Dharma"<sup>3</sup> he dwelt on the realisation of the Infinite by the finite through struggle and Progress. The very existence of limits, he urged, is a condition precedent to a struggle after the unlimited. But this moral endeavour is never complete unless it is placed under God's guidance. And the soul must be charged with love and beauty if man is to feel the intimations of His guidance which every individual receives in his own way. Thus by the realisation of love and beauty in man as a means

1. Vide "Jeevan Ved" by Keśavchandra Sen.

2. cf. ব্রাহ্মধর্মের মত ও বিশ্বাস, (1859-'60).

3. ব্রাহ্মধর্মের ব্যাখ্যান (1860-'61).

of realising God, Debendranath modified the principle of Rigorism which was only destructive. Between Rigorism and Hedonism he, like a true Indian Saint, laid down the way of the disinterested activities of God. This was the philosophy of Debendranath which he propounded through systems, Eastern and Western, and which he illustrated vividly in his own life and literature. And in so far as he emphasised the distinctness of the ego wedded to love and beauty in the pursuit of God, he represents not only a transition in the theology of the Samāj, but foreshadows to us a lyric tendency,<sup>1</sup> though in philosophy.

This slow accession of the monistic Brāhmo Samāj to the condition of a reasoned dualism appears to be an indirect reflex of individualism in the political philosophy of the nineteenth century.   
 Brāhmo Samāj and Neo-Hegelianism. In this respect Debendranath considerably enriched and mobilised the Vedantism of the Rājā, and the dialectic of the constructions of his conceptions as they have been just set forth, may be called neo-Hegelian: The conscious personality of the individual does not merge itself in the Infinite until it makes itself perfect through temporal strivings. On the other hand, the Infinite which is in itself a transcendent Reality externalises itself in and through the individual. "A person", says Prof. Royce, "is a conscious being, whose life, temporally viewed, seeks its completion through deeds, while this same life, eternally viewed, consciously attains its perfection by means of the present knowledge of the whole of its temporal strivings".<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the Upanishads of the East could have found, in the nineteenth century, no happier system of philosophy in the West than neo-

1. Though the Song-element in prayer was introduced by Rāmmohan, it became more important with the Maharsi (esp. when Keśavchandra joined the latter): A list of post-Rāmmohan song-writers on Brāhmoism: The Maharsi, Śastri Anandachandra Mitra, Rājñārain Basu, Trailakyanath Sānyāl, Sīvnāth Śastri, Satyendranath Tagore, Dwarakanath Ganguli, Jyotirindranath Tagore, Rabindranath Tagore etc.

2. Royce, *The World and the Individual*, Vol ii, P. 418.

Hegelianism which is apt to join hands with the Upanishads at so many points of the compass.

Before we proceed further, it will not be out of place to examine, briefly, the growth of the Freedom-movement in the Province. Closely allied with the enthusiasm for intellectual liberty was the passion for national independence, another characteristic that it shares with the English Renaissance under Italian influence. It is a commonplace to say that the popular idea of modern representative Government in India is the outcome of the spread of English literature with its Milton, Burke, Byron, Moore, and Mill. But the movement received a definite fillip through the efforts of some generous Britons<sup>1</sup>, George Thompson, Allan O. Hume, and Sir William Wedderburn, who really translated the ideas that were more or less literary, into problems of practical politics for the whole of India. Even at an earlier date the light of Freedom dawned on Rājā Rāmmohan, the real *Rājā* of modern India, when it found its concentrated expression in the *Brahmo Samāj*. His manifesto in favour of the liberty of the Press which has been christened the *Arcopagica* of India, is too well known to bear an elaborate explanation. As a matter of fact, he is said to have celebrated his jubilation over the victory of Spain (1820), immediately he received the news, by a dinner at Calcutta. Such an inspiring example is apt to raise a presumption that the country was as well prepared to receive with enthusiasm the news of the liberation of Greece (1829), or the popular agitation (1830) against the forces of Absolutism in France. But, above all, the Reform Bill of 1832, which had established the triumph of democracy in England, appears to have left a liberalising effect on the character of the

<sup>1</sup> George Thomson was instrumental in establishing the Landholder's Association, afterwards called the British Indian Association (1851). The valuable services of Mr. Hume and Sir William Wedderburn towards the requisition for an institution like the Indian National congress (1885) require no elaborate notice here.

British administration of India. The result of this Act was seen in the Parliamentary declaration of racial equality in India in 1833. Successive measures of reform were since passed to mitigate the high-handedness of the Company though no real relief was found practicable until we came to the conclusive proclamation of 1858.

But the impulse of a new life was soon observed. It was a different era that opened with the second half of the century with its incredibly rapid changes

The dawn of a new synthesis or re-integration. in every sphere of our thought. Seeds had already been sown in the

first half, and we were now to reap the harvest. The promise had no doubt been great, and we are happy to note that the fulfilment was greater still. The metaphysical subtleties of Theology fell to the ground, and there came Faith to flower into poetry. The Reformation had gone; the Renaissance with its *zeitgeist* began to work out the great synthesis—the synthesis of new ideals and our old poetical associations and romantic allusions of at least five hundred crowded years of the past.

## VI

From 1854, as an eminent Scholar<sup>1</sup> of the age remarks, Bengali literature was coming to its own. That year had seen the important educational despatch

Conditions of Bengal and Bengali literature from 1854-'60.

of Sir Charles Wood which created an Education Department in the Province with the system of grants-in-aid, and which gave considerable impetus to the cause of Vernacular Education throughout India<sup>2</sup>. In 1855 appeared the "Education Gazette" to which some of the greatest literary men of the time contributed, and of which the first editor was Rangalāl Banerjea. In the realm of social reform Išvarchandra Vidyāsāgar

1 Vide page 36, পুরাতন প্রসঙ্গ by Achārya Krishnakamal Bhattācharya,

2 See "Early native education under British auspices"—Mookerjee's magazine, New series, Vol. 1, 1872.

came out with flying colours in the celebration of the marriage of Rājānārāyan Basu's son to a widow, for the first time in 1856; and it is, indeed, hard to over-estimate the importance of that great humanitarian document, the Widow-Remarriage Bill, which was also passed in that very year<sup>1</sup>. The high-water mark of English education was, again, reached by the establishment of the University of Calcutta (1857), when Michael Madhusudan turned his thoroughly anglicised Muse to the services of his neglected mother tongue with a modest performance in the translation of *Ratnāvalī*. The great author made his mark next year by the publication and production of *Śarmistā* on the amateur stage at Belgāchiā<sup>2</sup> under the patronage of Jatindramohan Tagore and the Rājās of Paikpārā, followed by his two significant satires<sup>3</sup>. At the same time (i.e. 1858) Raṅgalāl's *Padminī upākhyān* came out with a preface striking as an adverse criticism of the frivolous poetry then in vogue, and remarkable as a departure in the author's serious conception of Poetry deeply saturated with the influences of English Romantic poets of that century. But the year (1857-1858) looms larger in the popular imagination for the rough and tumble of Politics in the Country.

In many respects, the year (1859-60) is a turning-point in the history of Bengal. Only a month ago the new Democratic Government of Victoria was ushered into existence with what is called the Magna Carta of India just when the flames of the Sepoy Mutiny had destroyed the old unruly rule of the Company. The establishment of the Pax Britannica held out the olive branch to every reactionary element. The solemn promise of peace and good Government helped the

1 Vidyāsāgar's keen interest in Widow-remarriage may be well appreciated by the fact that he spent, as he himself said, as much Eighty-two thousand rupees on Sixty-two Widow-remarriages.

2 See pages 225-227, "রামতনু লাহিড়ী ও তাৎকালীন বঙ্গসমাজ" by Paṇḍit Śivanāth Śāstri.

"একেই বলে সভ্যতা" and "বুড়ো শালিকের ঘাড়ে রেঁটা"।

creative activity of the nation to express itself in different directions. In literature also this year sounded the death-knell of the old in the death-knell of Išvar-chandra Gupta<sup>1</sup>. At the same time, the publication of Michael's *Tilottamā* in blank verse definitely announced the advent of Westernism in our poetry. It was also the middle of September 1860, that saw the first appearance of Dinobandhu's *Nildarpan* (The Mirror of the Indigo) which has been designated<sup>2</sup> as the "uncle Tom's cabin" for the abolition of the Indigo slavery in Bengal. The wretched plight to which the poor rayats were reduced by the European merchants offered, indeed, a sad contrast with the philanthropic work of their own missionaries. The Indigo Commission of the year represented, for the first time in the country, the height of the pressure of united public opinion, "the organisation and capacity for combined and simultaneous action"<sup>3</sup> voiced on the platform<sup>4</sup> as well as in the Press<sup>5</sup>. Staged in 1872 Dinobandhu's drama became a land-mark in the history and development of the professional Bengali stage, which had already opened with the author's two other dramas<sup>6</sup>. It was, again, in this period that the people first came to recognise patriotism as something like a distinct literary motif. And finally the year 1859 was signalised by the publication of the report of the Secretary of State for India, of the vigorous measures adopted for the promotion of Vernacular Education in Bengal, Bombay and Madras.

## VII

On the side of religion in the province, the reaction against the Paurānic Renaissance now produced another

1. Died in 1858.
2. See Dinobandhu's *Life* by Bankimchandra Chatterjee.
3. See "Bengal under the Lieutenant Governors" by E. C. Buckland.
4. The British Indian Association.
5. The "Hindu Patriot" of Hariśhchandra Mukherjee (1824-'61).
6. "স্বধবার একাদশী" and "লীলাবতী". For a short history of the amateur Bengali Stage, See chapter VIII, "মাইকেল মধুসূদন দত্তের জীবনচরিত" by Jogindranath Basu. Also see the essay on the *History of the Bengali stage* by Śyāmā Prasād Mookherjee ("Calcutta Review," January, 1924).



reaction in its turn. It was a dissidence of dissent, a protestantism against the Protestants. The wheel, therefore, had turned full circle when we returned to the Middle Ages not in their so-called superstitious rites or cold monasticism, but in their saner and ampler spirit of idolatry and *Bhakti* cult. The beginning of a synthesis, of a religion of harmony, of the true marriage of East and West, of religion and Science, was only the natural consummation of the past conflict which, because it did not end in suicide, fulfilled itself in harmony.

Roughly speaking, the enactment of the Brāhmo Marriage Bill (1872) and the publication of "Baṅgadarśan"<sup>1</sup> (1872) date the real birth of this neo-Hinduism. Its ethical side, we find, was represented in Bhūdebchandra Mukherjee (1825-1894), an earnest but orthodox compromise between the social and domestic problems of everyday Hindu life. The ingenious yet amusing scientific interpretations of Hindu customs by Śaśadhar Tarkachudāmani held the ground for a day. Krishnānanda Swami (1849-1902), on the other hand, turned the retrograde current of Hinduism by his ecstatic orations on Vedantic Vaiṣṇabism. Even the much-abused idolatry and caste system were found by Bijayakrishna Goswāmi to have, like even the minutest atoms of modern Science, their peculiar uses for the fruition of that far-off divine event towards which the whole creation moves. The trend of the Rāmkrishna-Vivekānanda movement also pointed to the unequivocal lesson of easy conformity of every other religion to our comprehensive Advaita Philosophy. And all these found a local habitation and a name in the "organic synthesis" of

1. In a letter to Śambhu Chandra Mukherjee, Bankimchandra made known the purpose of the publication of Baṅgadarśan thus: "I think that we ought to 'disanglicise' ourselves, so to speak, to a certain extent, and to speak to the masses in the language which they understand. I therefore project a Bengali Magazine."

Keśavchandra Sen—the “Concatenation of dispensations” which can only reveal “God in History.”

The splendid high-priests of this Hindu Renaissance were Rāmkrishna and Bāṅkimchandra—the saint of Daksineśwar, and the savant of Kāntalpārā. Both of them felt in their different ways that the need of the hour was the spirit of selfless service for one’s own country and for humanity at large. The Mother they worshipped was, in the last analysis, the Mother of the Universe, albeit they started with deifying their own. Their end was disinterested action, and their means was power that came from Renunciation.

At the apex of this cultural renaissance in Hinduism, however, stands Bāṅkimchandra Chatterjee (1838-1894), the representative genius of the age. Before him rolled the resurgent Ind shaken to its very depths by a sweeping West wind ; behind him the glorious past of his own people opened the dim scroll of its history illumined by Renunciation, the quintessence of Oriental Spiritualism ; and out of this restored self-possession arose the vision of “Mother”—the Mother of ‘seventy millions’ in all her real vigour and splendour. The “Son”, as he beheld her, chanted with full-throated ease the paeon of his anthem for his almighty Mother. That vision, it was held, might be vouchsafed only to one who, like the mediæval knight, could dedicate one’s pure life to her service without the least hope of reward on earth. But how was such a “son” possible in the larger life of the nation unless the family life were prepared with that end in view ? With the prophetic insight of a great artist he, therefore, turned to the national life of his people as a new riddle for solution ; and here, like Comte, he brought reason into complete harmony with feeling without impairing the activity of either<sup>1</sup>. Each of his problem-novels is really an *experimentum*

1. Here he welcomed the introduction of Western culture, and here also perhaps was the basis of his political view that the British conquest of India was *providential* !

*crucis* which teaches while it reproves. It was a fortunate coincidence of things that Bankimchandra's "disinterested action", of the *Gītā* conformed to the principle of Altruism in Comte's Positivism, and that his "Mother"<sup>1</sup> to Comte's "Madonna" as the visible representation of humanity. Yet, unlike the French philosopher, the Brāhmin theologian could not help believing in our catholic (Paurānic) Hinduism which he pressed into the literary services of a special epoch in our history<sup>2</sup>. The story of Hinduism, according to him, is a summing-up of Beauty, Truth, and Goodness—the perfect synthesis of which has enabled it to stand the ravages of time and scrutiny ; and so in his representations of our social life, of the fortunes of our domestic life, or of the evolution of the perfect man for humanity, the renewed life of neo-Hinduism had manifested itself through the broad gate-ways of Art, or through the by-paths of modern rationalistic discourses.

On the other hand, the emergence of Rāmkrishna Paramhansa (1835-1886) took the religious world by surprise. He was the highest embodiment of God-consciousness and piety in an age of Philistinism. Bohemian as our traditional Bāul, catholic as Chaitanya, child-like as Rāmprasād yet sober as a Vedantic Śaiva, he was, indeed, all rolled into one<sup>3</sup>. To all outward appearance he was, as he evidently seemed to be, a revivalist of the Paurānic śakta cult, in its essential mystical beauty. But with that irreducible minimum of dogma which only a confirmed devotee like him could transform by the magic of faith and love, he drew the whole enlightened section of our people to his own fold. Every brand

1. "আমার দুর্গোৎসব"—কমলাকান্তের দপ্তর।

2. The literary message on which Bengal has been harping from the age of Rāmmohan to the times of Rabindranath may be summed up thus : the final emancipation of the individual soul in and through selfless services to humanity at large.

3. cf. "My Master", 182-183, Vol. IV—Complete works of Vivekānanda.

of the neo-Hindus, sceptics, agnostics, positivists, monotheists, found consolation as well as inspiration from that "poor, illiterate, shrunken, unpolished, diseased, half-idolatrous, friendless Hindu devotee<sup>1</sup>". Certainly Reason was too frail to explain the phenomenon. One could only say that the "dark night of the soul" was over with us, and that the secret of all moralisings was faith and love—the realisation of an inward harmony in things apparently so discordant.

The mantle of Rāmkrishna's inspiration really fell upon Vivekānanda (1863-1902), the apostle of his gospels, and the St. Paul of his non-sectarian sect. From his great master he inherited, at the spiritual crisis of his life, the Religion of Humanity. This Humanity, however, was not, as it was to Rāmmohan, an abstract concept, but a particular concrete expression of the power that also moves him, of the realisation of the "Universal Man and the absolute and inalienable sovereignty of the self." With this promethean love for humanity he transmuted his Śāṅkarite vedantism into a living faith. India, of course, was his special object of concern, but the concern was born not so much of chauvinism as of his burning desire to kill the vampire of Western materialism which was sucking the blood of the spiritual India. The Chicago Address (1893), as a triumph of the Hindu Renaissance, is distinguished by the proud self-consciousness<sup>2</sup> that we belong to a great nation and to a greater religion, which refuses to be conquered by another, however powerful it might be in other respects. That sense of serene self-confidence which goes to the making of a virile inner life was, in his opinion, the main requisite for the nation if it were to live. Hence he did not believe in piecemeal reforms, but had firm faith in the general weal of

1. See the Theistic quarterly Review, 1879, (an article by P. C. Majumdar) repinted as a pamphlet by the followers of Rāmkrishna.

2. cf. "Modern India", 410-413, Vol. IV—Complete works of S. Vivekānanda ; also Introduction to "India's message to the world."

society that could proceed only from a healthy union of religion and science. He taught that religion was *realisation*, and not learning, sophistry or argument. With his great master he went back to the soul of ancient India to draw for the new age his message of Renunciation—the key to a true understanding of his whole personality and teachings. That gospel of renunciation, he emphasised, was more than ever necessary for us to lead the world to the kingdom of God by dissolving the thickening smoke of materialism. The prophet in him gave force to his appeal, and the poet supplied the colourful zest of emotional sincerity.

The revival of Vaisṇabism through Keśavchandra Sen and his compatriot, Bijayakrishna Goswāmi is a clear spiritual indication of the triumph of democracy

The New Dispensation and Keśavchandra (1879-1883). in Bengal. They broke with Maharsi Debendranāth on some essentially democratic points of caste and

marriage. From the time Keśav joined the Brāhmo Samāj (1850), his impulsive nature was groping to find out a “religion of life”, to realise ‘the Lord as a living God of Providence.’ Though ever since the final collapse of the Śāstras (1850) as an infallible guide, eclecticism had been the main philosophy of the Samāj, it was left to Keśav to start the “Brāhmo Samāj of India” (1866) as an original movement, to introduce into it the *yoga* and *Bhakti* elements in 1876<sup>1</sup>, and to make it the rallying-point of all spiritual cultures, of all doctrines and prophets. “A national Religion! A universal Religion! An Apostolical Religion! 2”. The New Dispensation as it was announced by the founder in 1881, “recognises in all the prophets and saints a harmony, in all the scriptures a unity, and through all dispensations a continuity.” The symbolic device of the New Dispensa-

1. It was this year that he met Rām Krishna Paramhaṁsa.

2. See page 350, *Life and Teachings of Kes'archandra Sen* by P. C. Majumdar.

tion—the cross, the crescent, the trident, and the Vedic Omkār—is, therefore, a fitting epitaph that marks the tomb of Keśav. In this “Catholic church of the Future” there was the spirit of the Oxford movement of Keble and Newman joined to the poetry of Rām Krishna’s catholicity—the ‘exaltation of the sacramental system as the divinely appointed means for the salvation of souls and to live that in life’. But it was, above all, “God’s saving mercy adapting itself in a special manner to the requirements of special epochs in the world’s history”; and he maintained that ‘manifestation’ by rituals inherited from Śāktaism, Vaiṣṇabism, and Christianity.

Whereas, during the third quarter of the century, the synthesis was chiefly emotional in Bengal<sup>1</sup>, outside it the synthesis was rational, somewhere, it seems, in the ramparts of Rāmmohan’s Aryan  
 Neo-Hinduism and its activities: Illumination. We mean the Theosophical Society established in 1875  
 rational. first at New York<sup>2</sup>, and the Arya Samāj brought into existence by Swami Dayānanda in 1876. The former originated in the researches of Western Scholars in oriental learning. It was a catholic home for the study of Aryan literatures, religions and sciences pursued with special reference to the unexplained laws of nature and the psychical evolution of man. At the same time Dayānanda’s Arya Samāj started a crusade against the idolatry of Paurānic faith, and a return to the orientalism of the Vedas.<sup>3</sup> But both these Societies did well

1. Bhudeb Chandra Mookerjee may be said to represent the rational synthesis in Bengal.

2. It was established in Bengal, 1882.

3. “The essential is that he (Swami Dayānanda) seized justly on the Veda as India’s Rock of Ages and had the daring conception to build on what his penetrating glance perceived in it a whole nation-hood. Rāmmohan Rāy, that other great soul and puissant worker who laid his hand in Bengal and shook her—to what mighty issues?—out of her long indolent sleep by her rivers and rice fields—Rāmmohan Rāy stopped short at the Upanishads. Dayānanda looked beyond and perceived that our true original seed was the Veda. He had the national instinct and he was able to make it luminous—an intuition in place of an instinct. Therefore the works that derive from him, however they depart from received traditions, must needs be profoundly national”—  
 Śrī Aurobindo Ghose—The *Arya*, Pondichery.

to adopt the medium of Western culture as essential to the growth of a perfect national culture in India.

Everywhere, then, we find that signs of an almost aggressive orientalism were manifest. The century opened with a quiet preparation and preliminary action; its climax with the first-fruits of English education was a *mêléc*; but happily its *dénouement* had the effect of a healthy reconciliation of the opposites, as one notices in our old sanskrit comedies. The confused elements now combined into some distinct vital unity. In the co-ordination of so many influences which, until then, had been in conflict, the period was the first articulate, beautiful and spoken energy of the era. But there was a rapidly growing demand for Pax Indica in place of Pax Britannica. With the setting of the century the sun of the East showed itself amid blood-red clouds, and lit up even the distant West. The curtain of the century fell, and in the golden radiance of hope, the people hallooed, Eastward ho !

This is, in brief, the story of the historical evolution of our racial genius, referred to at the very outset. This is the result of the influence of the civil and methodical man of the West over a latent and less organised people ; or to introduce a comparison, the conservative outlook of the Saxons mobilised by the liberalism of the administrative diplomacy of the clear-sighted Normans, though more various has been the work of English life and culture in the extension of civilization in India and indeed beyond it, than the effect of the Norman conquest on Saxon England. The matter and spirit of the problem, so far as they have been expressed in our poetry, will take up the following pages ; and here will be a proof, if any proof were needed, of the dreaminess, speculative-ness and impetuosity of the racial genius and their endless manifestations in our poetry.

## CHAPTER II

### THE LITERARY PROBLEM

#### THE NEO-ROMANTIC MOVEMENT IN BENGALI POETRY :

#### *REVOLT IN FORM AND MATTER*

### I

**E**VERY literature, says De Quincey, unless it be crossed by some other of different growth, and particularly, at a critical time of its career, naturally tends to superannuation ; and he points to Foreign influence as a vital necessity. the French as an example of one which suffered itself to be, in his opinion, on the point of extinction, because it had "rejected all alliance with exotic literature."

Such was the condition of our literature from about the middle of the eighteenth century down to the first-half of the nineteenth century (i.e. 1760-1830), during which we find no literary output of permanent value. Owing largely to a great disturbance in political, social and intellectual conditions, this, after all, proved a period of *ennui* or decadence in our literature, which having already exhausted all its past capital, stood in need of foreign reinforcements, if it were to have a fresh and renewed lease of life.

As to the real starting-point of this influence in our poetry there is little room for a difference of opinion. The year 1800 may, of course, be considered a landmark as the year of the foundation of the Fort William College, an important centre of education of the age. A goodly crop of English educational institutions rapidly arose on the soil sending their roots deep into as many directions. Bengali prose was being anxiously fostered by the foreigners and the English-educated natives, while the elder sister Poetry was too often sporting in the arcadian shades of the distant village green. Foreign contagion of any kind

First evidence of this influence in our poetry.



could not touch these untutored poets. On the contrary, a definite contempt for anything exotic was being voiced by Ísvarchandra Gupta (1811-1858) whose satirical vein, so radically averse to the reception of new ideas of reform, could not absorb the healthy element of foreign culture. All reforms or attempts at reforms were viewed by him with a zealous suspicion and a sceptical doubt, though he was at times awakened to the achievements of science and to the progress of the modern world<sup>1</sup>. The next important poet, who followed him in the field with a cultured and confirmed taste for things foreign, is Rangalál Banerjea, whose preface to the *Padminí upākhyān* published in 1858 may be taken as the first definite landmark of Western influence in our poetry. This is the only definite date that we can gather for our purpose.

"The period of Bengali literature between 1760 and 1830," says a critic, "may not be unfitly described as a lyrical interval in which a multitude of Productions, varied, grave and gay ditties,

Literary decadence in Bengal on the eve of western influence. *kābi, tappās, yātrā, pāmchālī, dhap, ħirtan, bāul*, devotional songs and

exquisite bits of love-lyrics were pouring upon the world a flood of delicious harmony"<sup>2</sup>. But even these songs and lyrics, in spite of their passionate sincerity and intense realism, had, in course of time, come to be stale and monotonous. The songs of the Kabiwallas, the *tappās* of Nidhu Babu (1738-1825), or of Śrīdhar Kathak, and even the devotional lyrics of Rāmprāsād (1718-75) could not inspire any richer and newer class of poetry in their successors. Followers

1. But Ísvarchandra's intentions behind his anti-western propaganda must not be misunderstood, for it may be argued that he erred on the side of an honest conviction. In his almost superstitious love for everything indigenous he rejected the good along with what he thought to be evil in western ideals. He chose, like Langland, the old form of indigenous poetry for the expression of his social satires. But if the war-cry of Ísvarchandra was the swan-song of the kabi school of our poetry, it was, in another respect, the clarion-call to the new orientalism which reached its climax in Bañkimchandra, the herald of the new school of Bengali literature.

2. See *Bengali literature in the nineteenth century* by S. K. De, p. 387.

of Bhāratchandra (1722-1760) betray the same sort of limitations in subject-matter, in literary spirit and in rhetorical devices. With the Kabiwallas the simple emotional appeal, or the spiritual fervour of Vaiṣṇava poetry as freed from its metaphysical complexity, had almost come to be a mechanical art. In the hands of the later group of *tappā* writers, again, the treatment of love became conventional as they failed to strike a new note in their old lyre. And the theme of the Śakta type of the literature reached the climax of artistic improvement in the devotional songs of Rāmprāsād, whose successors like Kamalā Bhaṭṭāchāryya (died 1836), and Dewan Rāmdulāl Nandi (1785-1851), lacking in their master's intensity of religious inspiration, became dry, laboured and artificial. Thus the art of the eighteenth-century School of our poetry came to be not the art of deeper emotional life, but the art of artifice.

Some sort of foreign influence, literary or otherwise, was, therefore, an imperative necessity for our literature, if it sought to be an expression of the concrete realities of life. A revolt was, indeed, urgent; and what the immigrant Western ideas did, was not to re-create it altogether, but to hasten the process of this spirit of revolt which was crying to break open the prison-walls of the eighteenth-century poetry. "He (Bhāratchandra) paints a harrowing picture of the limitless anarchy of his time which proclaims loudly that the old order must change giving place to the new, if the Bengalee people were to grow. In a lyric of rare beauty and sincerity, Bhāratchandra addressing his God says 'the game you play everyday is not good for everyday; so play something new after my heart.' His prayer was heard, and within a year (?)<sup>1</sup> of the poet's death the battle of Plassey was fought and won by the English".

1. The battle of Plassey was fought and won on the 23rd June, 1757—Bhāratchandra died in 1760.

2. Vide *The story of Bengali literature* by Mr. P. Chaudhuri. p. 18.

## II

The immediate result of this reaction in our poetry was the revival of the past ; and the revival, as it had been with the English Romantic movement, was in the direction of Romance. The his-

Revival of the past.

torical imagination of our people lent itself firstly to retrospection, towards bringing the dead past back to life. They fell back upon the annals of Rājasthān (e.g. Raṅgalāl), upon Paurānic stories (e.g. Hemchandra), upon the Rāmāyana (e.g. Michael), and the Mahābhārata (Nabinchandra). As an outcome of the reaction Raṅgalāl's romances had almost the same significance for the nation as Scott's had for his people. A passion for the place was likewise stirred in our later metrical romancers by this passion for its past stories and legends. The incidents of love, chivalry and war were borrowed from the historical poems of Scott, as we shall see, by Raṅgalāl in his poetical romances. And even the fire of Patriotism in our poetry may be said to have been inflamed more or less by the poems of Scott, Moore, Campbell, James Thomson, and Alfred Austin<sup>1</sup>.

Of these metrical romances, Raṅgalāl's *Padminī upākhyān* (1858) is the first in the field, and for its purple patches is still unsurpassed in spite of a host of rivals. His *Karma Devī* (1862) is

Early metrical romances as modelled on Western poets.

also an example of that new Romance which was sought to reproduce the

spirit of the Rajput heroes in their love, chivalry and

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|-----------------------------|--|
| 1. { Moore :                | From life without freedom.                     |
| { ( <i>Irish melodies</i> ) | Oh ! who would not fly etc.                    |
| { cf. Raṅgalāl :            | স্বাধীনতা হীনতায় কে বাঁচিতে চায় রে ?         |
|                             | [Oh, who would like to live without freedom ?] |
| { Campbell :                | Patriotic songs.                               |
| { cf. Hemchandra :          | ভারত-সঙ্গীত—General trend of thought.          |
| { James Thomson :           | Rule Britannia.                                |
| { cf. Hemchandra :          | ভারত-বিলাপ ।                                   |
| { Alfred Austin :           | The English Maid.                              |
| { cf. Hemchandra :          | কামিনী-কুহুদ ।                                 |

mediæval tournaments. *Śūrsundarī* (1863) is a beautiful narrative, in which even the details of historic truths have not been sacrificed to the exigencies of a facile pen. In all these poems Rāṅgalāl, like Scott, puts the tales into the mouth of minstrels as he intends to make them "lays." His poetry, like Scott's, breathes a fervent spirit of love for his fatherland, though his famous patriotic lyric in *Padminī upākhyān* appears, as we have just seen, to be an almost literal translation of a lyric from Moore's "Irish Melodies." Though at times rugged, his verse has an air of freedom and vividness added to a natural grace and "a hurried frankness of composition<sup>1</sup>." In descriptions of battles his poetry also appears to image forth the rush of steeds and the clang of weapons. Very often does Rāṅgalāl mourn the disappearance of romance and chivalry from our life<sup>2</sup>; and his quotation of a stanza from Scott, attached to the preface of *Kānchikāverī* (1875), shows that he took his ancient themes as seriously as his Scotch master had taken his own.

Rāṅgalāl's first venture was followed by Michael's *Tilottamā* (1861), but it was a departure not only for its blank verse and mythological plot, but also for its tendency towards the ideal world of beauty and romance.

If the military and chivalrous side of the mediæval ages is more thoroughly portrayed by Rāṅgalāl, the superstitious and the supernatural aspects have found expression in Hemchandra. In *Mediævelism. Bīrābāhu Kāvya* (1862-'66) fairies and anchorites hang round the daring exploits of a Rajput hero who renounces the world to regain the lost ground of Hinduism. It is a *roman d'adventures* or metrical tale of chivalry with a spirited note of patriotism as its leaven. *Chāyyāmayī* (1880) is a romance

1. See Scott's note on his own composition prefaced to *The lady of the lake*.

2. See *Karma Devi*, 1st canto, and *Padminī upākhyān*, introduction.

of supernatural horrors presented by a tale of ghosts and goblins. As an avowed imitation of Dante it no doubt falls in line with the Dante Revival in England during the first three decades of the last century. But it is also significant that it was written in an atmosphere, which was thick with the spirit of psychical research inaugurated by the Theosophical Society in India. It deals with an imaginary picture of life after death—visions of Hell, of planetary and astral systems, with souls consigned to a distinct stage in Hell and Purgatory according to their individual actions on Earth, by the immutable decrees of vice and virtue. It closes with a seeming conviction that the spirit of the dead can, after all, be invoked by the living. On the whole, it satisfies the fancy but not the imaginative requirements of Poetry.

Written in a truly impassioned style Nabinchandra's romance of *Palāśir Yuddha* (1875) was modelled on the historical scenes of Byron's *Childe Harold*. In the metrical scheme it appears to be a slight variation of the English model. Apart from this the poet fulminated his fiery denunciation of injustice, fraud and tyranny, his literary wit and banter, his love of freedom ; and he carried his Byronic inspiration to another of his metrical romance called *Raṅga-matī* (1880).

*Swapna Prayān*, composed (1878) by the late Dwijendranāth Tagore, is a kind of modern Morality drama in Bengali poetry in which virtues and vices are personified to fight round the central figure, the "poet." It may be taken as a metaphysical analysis of poetry artistically designed to show its rightful function in life, and the true conditions on which it could work ; and it has ideas and imaginative visions which are rather Dantesque, but a final mysticism which is wholly vedantic.

## III

The next poetical experiment that had been tried was the epic, but the actual result achieved was not a true epic, but a type of heroic verse between the epic and the romance. And the reasons are not far to seek : For not only was the epic an anachronism in the century with its all-absorbing lyricism, its lingering doubts and disbeliefs, not only was the growing power of the utilitarian theory less favourable to the acceptance of the voluminous epic ; not only did the influence of Science make men more positivistic in thought, but also the lyric in the Bengalee temperament did not admit the epic outlook, as witnessed by the absence of what may be called an epic tradition in the race. Hence there was "imitation" and emulation which succeeded merely in dressing up ideas and sentiments in an epical garb where essential practical interests were lacking.

It would thus be idle to represent the society of that age as heroic in the same sense as the Greeks in Homer were heroic, or the life and times of the Teutonic alliterative poems, of the French *Chansons de Geste* and the Icelandic sagas are said to have been heroic.

Not epics in the true sense.

Nor do we find in our epic poets that dramatic detachment of Homer, or of the poets of the Rāmāyana and the Mahābhārata. Only in an intellectual interest in our past legends and beliefs should we, therefore, seek a justification for what is popularly called 'epic' in our literature of the last century. Out of the depths of their national past our epic poets revived a magnificent story or a personage into which were woven a mental tradition which was their own, and an experience which virtually belonged to their own age. Herein lies the creative personality of our poets who themselves form the warp and woof of their heroes. "Heroic poetry", says Prof. Ker, "implies an heroic age, an age of pride and

courage, in which there is not any extreme organisation of politics to hinder the individual talent and its achievements, nor on the other hand, too much isolation of the hero through the absence of any national or popular consciousness."<sup>1</sup> It was precisely in such a twilight of the national Renaissance that these so-called epics<sup>2</sup> were born. But as they were interrupted by lyrical considerations and the divided aims of modern life they came to stand, like Keats's *Hyperion*, on a level which was peculiarly their own.

A note of lyrical poignancy and pathos, for example, runs throughout the real epic style and conventions of the *Meghanād badh*. There is a deep

Reasons why they  
cannot be called true  
epics.

subjective note that rings true in the solemn orchestral melodies contributed by so many foreign masters. Hemchandra, no doubt, maintains an epical mood, the mood of sustained dignity, elevation and high-spiritedness. He reads a philosophic meaning into the conflict of energy—the theme of modern metaphysical epos. But an impression of artistic inadequacy ultimately gains upon the reader in the treatment of his great epic in spite of its snatches of epic grandeur. The heroine Oindrila, for example, the embodiment of feminine jealousy, shows no psychological evolution in her character. She remains the type of jealousy to the very last moment when suddenly by a single stroke of the poet's pen she is flung up to the cosmic level of tempestuous insanity. In other words, Hemchandra's types are not individualised. Their primary emotions are not rooted in the flesh and blood of individual characters ; and perhaps the absence of this essential dramatic intensity and variety, as of an actual pulsating life, in the epic, leaves the reader high and dry in spite of the poet's fulfilment of the *Vīra-rasa*.

1. See page 20, *Epic and Romance* by W. P. Ker.

2. For the sake of convenience, we shall call them *epics* in the following pages.

Nabinchandra's cycle of epics is really a compromise between the epic and the romance. Temperamentally, he was unfit to hide himself behind the screen and to let the drama of life speak for itself. It would perhaps be not altogether amiss to call the cycle a "medley"—grand, epic and homicidal—distinguished, however, by his own allegorico-mystical strain.

#### IV

Between the romances and the epics there flourished another class of narrative poems which, for want of a better name, may be called "verse-tales". As a poetical form "verse-tale" is, of course, Verse-<sup>tales of a</sup> new type. <sup>no new element in our poetry.</sup>

Examples of the "verse-tale" are not rare in the Rāmāyana and the Mahābhārata, in the poems of Kabikāṅkan and Bhāratchandra. Yet they are all episodes attached to a bigger whole, and cannot stand by themselves. They are mostly religious poetry, religious in mōtif and sometimes sectarian in spirit. But secularity of a serious kind, a variety of outlook, an attempt to make each an artistic unit are the characteristics of the "verse-tales" of this period. Hemchandra's *Chintātarāṅginī*, *Aśāḥānan*, *Chhāyāmayī*, *Daśamahāvidyā*; Nabinchandra's Avatar-hymnology—*Amitābha*, *Amritābha*, *Christ*; Bihārīlāl's *Prema-Pra-bāhinī*; *Nisargasandarśan*; Surendranāth's *Sabitā Sudarśan*; Kāmini Rāy's *Mahāśvetā* and *Pundarīka*<sup>1</sup> etc., are examples of the class, though none of them excepting Nabinchandra's biographical sketches of the prophets and the two last-named poems, has got any high artistic value of its own.

#### V

It is significant to note that with the decline of epics and imitative metrical romances, the lyric came

1. Vide আলো ও ছায়া (published 1889).



to the forefront attended, of course, with the novel.

The lyric.

But it is still more significant that the lyric as a means of self-expression became increasingly popular with the growing popularity of neo-Hinduism ; for, as a matter of fact, both of them can be correlated to the tangential point of the national mind—the craze for the mystic and the picturesque. On the granite of puritanic Brahmoism anything but poetry could grow. Hence for the rise of the lyric with its music, magic, brevity, and subjectivity the alluvial soil of the Paurānic Renaissance of the age was indispensable. Through the literary contact with the West the nation was awakened not only to the cult of Individualism but also to its own past, and to the call of its rapturous soul. It found forms for the formless, and the concrete for the abstract wares of the preceding decades.

The æsthetic revival, therefore, turned to the middle ages in their inward religious symbolism and mysticism. Whether this poetic outburst in itself was

Variety in lyrical themes.

an echo of the kindred note of mediævalism in the English Romantic movement of the age or not, is a point not so much important for the purposes of our criticism as the individual manner in which the nation was inspired to speak itself out in songs and lyrics. Its hopes and fears ; its loves and regrets ; its joys and sorrows ; its ideas and ideals ; its abandon in the beauties of a life idyllic—these are the real stuff of which the whole lyrical dream was made. The human note came to dominate the religious ; the spiritual was intimately associated with the human ; the mythologies of old were read as individual human documents ; but above all, the commonest things in men and nature were set against a halo of romance and idealism.

Along with this optimism there ran, however, a pervading note of pessimism which, in fact, threaten-

ed to be the dominating feature of the poetry of that age. To the foreign current of unbelief and irreligion we have already assigned this mental attitude, but nevertheless it was a literary fashion both at home and abroad. "During the last few years", said Mr. Alfred Austin in 1893, "a wave of doubt, disillusion and despondency has passed over the world. One by one, all the fondly cherished theories of life, society and empire had been abandoned. We no longer seemed to know whither we were marching, and many appeared to think that we were marching to Perdition." Wordsworth's 'despondency', Mill's 'dejection', and Teufelsdröckh's 'Eternal Nay' are some of the many notable instances of the "mawkishness and all the thousand bitters" that also distinguished the young poet of *Endymion*. Byron, Shelley, and most of the Victorian poets in England, Heine in Germany, and Leopardi in Italy are poets of the pessimism which is generally supposed to be the child of the French Revolution. The common refrain was that life was a burden and a futility, and that, above all, there was a higher agency, call it Fate or anything else, that presided over the destinies of man. These sentiments were echoed in the early poems of Michael, Hemchandra, Nabinchandra, Bihārīlāl, Akshay Barāl, Adharlāl Sen, Kāminī Rāy, Saralābālā Dāsi, Priyambadā Debi, and Rabindranāth Tagore.<sup>1</sup> All of them, in their early compositions, were dominated by a morbid melancholy, an unreality, and a kind of Wertherism which was altogether a new current in our poetry.

Certainly, the perception of a 'hidden want' in the scheme of attainable things is responsible for such a feeling in man. This 'want' was, for most of the later lyrical poets, the want in the sensuous world of an ideal Beauty which tolerates no mutability or chance in any

1. An interesting specimen of this attitude is Rabindranāth's *Bhagna Hriday*. cf. also his *Sandhyā Sangīt*. In *Banaphul*, another very early composition, the influence of Bihārīlāl is perhaps more evident than in any other poem.

form. Viewed in the dry light of reason it is a dream, though a reality in the world of ideas, on which poets are so frequently fed. And, therefore, as it comes into clash with the hard facts of life, it is rudely awakened to a world of sorrows, cares and despair. The modern method of bridging this eternal gulf lies in human love, the doorway to love divine. This was the most pertinent problem of Shelley and of some Victorian poets, and the receptive minds of our poets seem to have borrowed this solvent either to re-create it through their own lives in poetry, or to re-interpret our mythologies and legends for the purpose of this new ideal. With their own life as centre they drew a circle in their poetry which covered the whole life of humanity, because the problem they handled was universal in its scope. It is especially the contribution of Bihārīlāl and his School of lyrical poets, such as Akshay Barāl, Nityakrishna Basu, Debendranāth Sen, and Rabindranāth Tagore.

But the variety of this mystical current of thought is now to be observed. In their attitudes to life the poets of this age walked on different grounds, and

hence their appeal was so different. Various types of mysticism in lyrics. Bihārīlāl and his School<sup>1</sup> are Love

and Beauty mystics. Hemchandra's philosophical mysticism lies in an imaginative conviction that in the gradual evolution of the universe the wrong will right itself in the end. Everything, according to him, is converging towards the one principle of good that will ultimately triumph over evil. Dwijendranāth Tagore, the metaphysical bard, is thoroughly oriental in his mystical beliefs and allegorizings. Surendranāth Majumdar is also a philosophical mystic who sang of universal womanhood as a beneficent principle of love, and of the magic play of an unseen power controlling the destinies of things. In his poetical matter there is an occasional relief of

1. Akshay Barāl cannot be called a mystic poet. For passion, force and firm outlines of realistic pictures, his love-lyrics are still unsurpassed in Bengali poetry.

foreign thoughts which he transmuted into a controlled lyrical strain. Nabinchandra is a religious mystic, and pre-eminently devotional. With all his excursions into the lighter walks of life, Debendra-nāth Sen might be considered a nature-mystic, though somewhat of the Keatsian type. The iridescent flower of this 'mystical' tree and the fruit of it, is Rabindranāth Tagore.

Lyricism is no less marked in the small group of women-poets<sup>1</sup> that flourished with the advent of

Women-poets. this new cultural fusion. Mrs.

Kāminī Rāy sees everything with the eye of a realist, and sketches with the pencil of an artist. Her prevalent mood of optimism comes out of her subdued idealism. She has the faith, passion, love, and the controlling feminine power of her Mahāśvetā. Without the aid of colour she can make her pictures live by virtue of her profound humanity<sup>2</sup>. Mrs. Girindramohini Dāsi's beauty-way of seeing man and nature is the main characteristic of her eclectic mind<sup>3</sup>, and the confident note of robust optimism in Mānkumāri Basu's poetry is an expression of the reaction against the imitative westernism of Bengal in the early nineteenth century.

1. Though by her age Mrs. Swarnākumāri Debi belongs to this Renaissance, the publication of her poetry (e.g. *Giti-Guecha* etc.) is only of quite recent date. See pages 219-220, *Literature of Bengal* by R. C. Dutta.

2. But the poetess's gift of subtle intellectual analysis, bringing out the uncommon in the common, the hidden grace, the soul of individuality, the note of charm or pathos, in the ordinary scenes and situations of life, has in it a rare and exquisite flavour, and is entirely novel in Bengali literature. Of Wordsworth, who possessed this gift (along with the faculty divine, the consecration and the dream) in a greater degree than most other men, there is a genuine echo in many of the lyrics (as in *O My Destiny*, *The pole-star*, *The traveller's Greeting*, *To a three years' child*, *In Abraham's Bosom*, *The Mother's call*, *The inner Soul of Beauty*). Hope, love, self-renunciation, the quest after happiness, are treated from the idealistic point of view ; but the idealism here is more largely an echo of Shelley in his moods of Platonic optimism, than of that traveller between life and death, Wordsworth.

*The neo-romantic movement in literature* by Sir B. N. Seal, Pp. 102.

3. Vide "অৰ্ঘ্য", especially, the poem মন্থনান ।

From the above inquiry, then, we may obtain the following results :—  
 Summary of the results of our inquiry.

1. Introduction of *variety in verse-forms* such as we have just seen, together with the *sonnet* and *tragedy* as distinct literary types<sup>1</sup>.

2. The yoke of the closed couplet “payār” was shaken off by the introduction of Michael’s blank verse and by frequent successful experiments in other metres, such as we find in *Palāśir Yuddha*, which is an easy variation of Childe Harold’s Spenserian stanza. The metrical swing of the patriotic lyrics of Rāṅgalāl and Hemchandra may be said to have been drawn from Moore and Campbell. Permutations and combinations of old Bengali metres went on to express received ideas on different poetical models. The poetic diction came to reflect the infinite manifestations of man and nature. There was a definite unprecedented art-consciousness in these poets who were all “Apostles of enlightenment.”

3. Scott and Moore restored the old notes of chivalry and Patriotism (e.g. Rāṅgalāl). With them also followed an attempt to reconcile with the spirit of modern age our Vaiṣṇavism, Śāktaism and the romantic tales of the Purāṇas. The military, religious and social life of the Middle Ages thus supplied materials for a neo-romantic movement in our poetry, and we may characterize the whole mediæval life so revived, by the word “picturesque.”

4. The influence of Byron was also a powerful factor which gave to our poetry a ‘pale cast of thought’ so closely associated with the mawkish sentimentalism in England and *Wertherism* on the Continent, for the speculative genius of the nineteenth century was, as Emerson so happily observed, a sort of living Hamlet. (e.g. early poems of Nabinchandra).

5. And last but not least, the influence of Shelley was instrumental in reviving our mystic temper, in

1. See P. R. Sen’s *Western influence in Bengali literature*, ch. V.

adding curiosity to the desire of beauty. (e.g. Bihārīlal).

Yet all these results may be compressed into the three prominent characteristics of the Romantic movement in our literature, as they were of the parent movement in England : *subjectivity, picturesqueness, and revolt*. (In the present instance, "Revolt" would, however, be more appropriate term than "Reaction", because the former came to dominate other spheres of thought. We had also seen 'reaction' in so far as there was a breaking away from the immediate moorings of our past cultural traditions).

To express the growing diversity of thought and feeling, we observe, new ideas and new poetical forms were imported and experimented upon. Romances,

Epics, Verse-tales, and Lyrics are  
 Conclusion. illustrative as much of the vastness

of a foreign literary heritage as of a complex national awakening at home. Each of these poetical forms has, indeed, won a distinct ground in our literature. Each has been popular to the extent of the spontaneity it has shown in reflecting the heart of the nation. What was content with building on mere sands of imitation has dropped to the ground. What introduced us to our own Muse, and then left us to ourselves, has alone survived the test of time. The best poems of the century are, therefore, those which betray the least direct influence of the West. Not so much to the mere form of our poetry as to its indwelling spirit, not so much to fragments as to the whole, to the underlying movement of foreign thought as an influence in creative Art should, therefore, our attention be directed in this study of the poetry of the age.

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## INTERCHAPTER I

LIFE OF MICHAEL MADHUSŪDAN DUTT (1824-'73).

“THE light of poetry”, says Hazlitt, “is not only a direct but also a reflected light, that while it shews us the object, it throws a sparkling radiance on all around it.” To put it more piquantly, one may say that poetry is both endogenous and exogenous ; or in plain English, it may be said to mean that the poet carries into his work the spirit of his times as much as the influence of his heredity.

No appreciation of Michael’s poetry would, therefore, be complete unless it takes note of his biography considered in relation to his environment and heredity. From the extant account of the poet’s life it is quite apparent that his extravagance in personal habits had been a family trait which was only aggravated by the prevailing intemperance of the times ; while it is possible to argue that the native impatience of his character, another key-note of his meteoric career, drew him into the vortex of the *Sturm und Drang* in young Bengal.

Madhusūdan was born 1824 in the village of Sāgardāri at Jessore. The beauty of the murmuring sound of the river *kapotāksha* which streamed past his home must have passed into his poetic soul, for he refers so feelingly to this sweet old association in his little autobiographical epitaph that adorns his tomb. In surroundings of great natural beauty and in an atmosphere of literary culture, then, Madhusūdan spent his boyhood with his indulgent parents till he joined the Hindu College at the age of thirteen.

The poet was one of the first-fruits of English education in Bengal and naturally enough, he imbibed the revolutionary influence of his teacher, Derozio who was to his pupils a guide, philosopher and friend. Even as student in Hindu College Michael earned no small reputation by his composition of English verses<sup>1</sup>, chiefly on the two old Byronic themes of Love and Misanthropy, which were the contagion of the new Era ; and hence it was that the young poet was inspired with the

1. The first Hindu who ventured to publish (1830) a volume of English Poems ‘D’ was Kāśiprasād Ghose.



hope of wresting his laurels out of the grudging hands of the English Muse across the seas :

I sigh for Albion's distant shore,  
Its valleys green, its mountains high ;  
Though friends, relations I have none  
In that far clime ! yet oh I sigh  
To cross the vast Atlantic wave  
For glory, or, a nameless grave—

*Kidderpore, 1841*

Now came the turning-point in the poet's career when his father sought to marry, in the right orthodox style, his anglicised boy to a 'native' girl. The wayward youngster refused to marry her, and evaded his obligations to his father by embracing Christianity on 9th February, 1843. Next he joined the Bishop's College at S'ibpore, and continued his studies even now at his father's expense, and it was here that he mastered three great classical languages, Greek, Latin and Sanskrit. He had already learnt English and Persian at the Hindu College ; and afterwards he picked up Tamil and Telegu in Madras, and French, German, Italian and Hebrew when he had gone over to Europe at a later date.

Then he left the Bishop's College in 1848 to try his fortune at Madras where he lived for sometime on hackwrit-ing for the local papers. His English compositions very soon made him prominent in the public eye. Here he published his English poem, *Captive Ladie*, (1849) in which there are passages that "neither Scott nor Byron would have been ashamed to own." And here he married the daughter of a European indigo-planter, but only to separate from her in a very short time and marry the daughter of the Principal of the local Presidency College.

For our purpose, the next stage of Madhusūdan's life is the most important one, because in less than five years' time he composed poems in Bengali which have served to rank him the greatest poet of Bengal in the last century. In 1856 he came back from Madras, and worked as a clerk and interpreter at the Calcutta Police Court. Then all of a sudden he fell into a hurried composition of poetry in his mother tongue, as will be evident from the following list of his works :

His meteoric career  
in the composition of  
Bengali poetry.

S'armiṣṭa—1858

Padmāvati—1859

Tilottamā sambhava—1860

Meghanād-Badh—1861

Krishna-Kumārī— „

Brajāṅganā— „ (*unfinished*)

Bīrāṅganā—1862

But these feverish activities in Bengali literature were interrupted by his sudden departure for Europe in 1862. During his stay abroad he composed sonnets and some dramatic fragments called “Queen Seeta”<sup>1</sup> and “Subhadra-haran”.

His last days. Undoubtedly Madhusūdan realised his long-cherished ambition of crossing the seas, but his pecuniary troubles multiplied, and he fell back upon the charity of Is'varchandra Vidyāsāgar. In 1867 Madhusūdan came back to India, and started practising as barrister without success. Then he tried many odd jobs, and yet nothing relieved him in the least of his financial distress. On the contrary his pecuniary troubles were gradually aggravated, and he found in drinking the only possible escape from the stern realities of life.

Imagination recoils from painting the harrowing scenes of the last days of the poet in the Charitable Hospital at Alipore where he breathed his last on 29th June, 1873.

1. Like his noble mother he was a devoted student of the Rāmāyana and the Mahābhārata, and he committed to memory a large portion of the two great epics.

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### CHAPTER III

MADHUSŪDAN'S *TILOTTAMĀ-SAM̐BHAVA* (1859-60),  
*BRAJĀṄGANĀ* (1861) AND *BĪRĀṄGANĀ* (1862).

**T**HE story of the new Bengali poetry is a story of Reconstruction. The great architect of this Reconstruction is the buoyant and meditative imagination of the nation which, as we have seen, derived from outside most of the materials and methods it used in the lofty edifice of our poetry. It was with the foreign *enlightenment* that the nation kept time, for the novelty of the vast Western literature and philosophy held its imagination busy. But the advent of spring is always preceded by winter—the winter of chill and stagnation which was represented in our literature by Bhāratchandra's school of poetry. Between him and Michael came Išvarchandra Gupta as an interlude or exhilarating relief. There are superficial evidences of Westernism in him, though there is an obvious dislike for it, or flippancy in its treatment. Yet we may regard him as a link in the chain of those conditions that brought about the shifting of Bengali poetry from hamlet to hall. And in the march of this evolution, Raṅgalāl is the promise of this new era, and Madhusūdan its fulfilment.

It is interesting to observe that the anglicised Madhusūdan came back to his own through another channel of æsthetic activity which was itself a result of Western influence, viz., the rise of the Bengali stage. Incapacity of the purely indigenous dramas of that age to satisfy the growing taste of an enlightened public led to his translation of *Ratnāvalī* (1857-'58), the success of which on the stage set his imagination soaring. Success followed success, and within the space of five years (1858-'63), his Muse lifted out of the 'Helicon quarry,' accomplished miracles

The literary background of *Tilottamā*.

Madhusūdan's phenomenal success in Bengali poetry.

for our literature. What was not handled in a new way—Drama, Romance, 'Epic', Lyric, Sonnet—and what did not bring him, in some form or other, to his claims to immortality? The freaks of a vagrant career were brought to bear upon the fruition of a steady native impulse; and the foreign poets who were the gods of young Bengal only remained to act from behind the scene. The amalgam of native sweetness and foreign strength makes the poetry of this period in general, and that of Madhusūdan in particular, an especially interesting study.

Apart from its blank verse, the publication of *Tilottamā-sambhava* is an important document, because it is the first poetical romance of that age in the revival of Hindu mythology, but especially because of its suggestions of deeper romanticism in the treatment. Personal aptitudes of the poet reflected, for example, in his predilection for Vaiṣṇabic similes, in crediting the otherwise heroic Kārtikeya with a soft romantic voice, are to be observed even in this early performance. The description of the Brahmapuri by Viśvakarmā<sup>1</sup> has at least a strangeness of effect about it. The twilight of the unknown, according to Vāyu, is a distinctive feature of the North Pole<sup>2</sup>. The recognition of an indwelling beauty in things for its own sake, of the relation between man and nature, and the myth-making faculty<sup>3</sup> of Madhusūdan hold out the promise of the *Meghanād badh* though the predominating influence of Sanscrit poets sometimes leads to grotesque

Romantic treatment  
of Hindu mythology.

1. Vide Canto III., *Tilottama*.

2. ওই দেখ তিমির-মাগর

অকুল, পর্বতাকার যাহার লহরী

উখলিছে নিরবধি মহা-কোলাহলে,

কে জানে জল কি স্থল? বুঝি দুই হবে; (তৃতীয় সর্গ)

Tr. Behold the limitless ocean of darkness whose mountain-high waves are for ever roaring thunders, deluding the senses whether it is sea or land or even both.

3. Loc. Cit.—The reflection of *Tilottamā*.

exaggerations which are apt to mar the effect of true romance.

It is quite possible that, like Padmāvati, the Paurāṇic legend of *Tilottamā-Sambhava* was also suggested by the Greek story of the Apple of Discordia. Even

Western influence  
in *Tilottamā*.

within the legitimate borrowings from Sanskrit authors there are unmistakable traces of Western poets, such as of Milton and Keats. Majestic and solemn notes may be heard in this romance, and by similarities of incidents towards the end it easily anticipates the greatness of the *Meghanād-badh*. The creation of *Tilottamā* by Viśvakarmā, like the manufacture of thunder in Hemchandra's *Britra-Samhāra*, naturally reminds the reader of the forging of Achilles's shield by Vulcan. But even more glaring is the influence of English poets. We find the poet growing rather epical in narrating the pageants and processions of gods, and the picture that he gives of Brahmapuri in the opening lines of Canto III, reflects, though feebly, the image of Paradise and the innocent state of man in Milton's *Paradise Lost*<sup>1</sup>. Again, when we follow the god of storm in his flight to the abode of the great Architect<sup>2</sup>, we are surfeited with an excess of poetic imagery though not as brilliant as we find in *Endymion*<sup>3</sup> where the hero is made to enter into the bowels of the Earth and the depths of the sea. The sorrows of the vanquished Indra are reminiscent of the lamentations of Saturn in Keats's *Hyperion*, and the weeping figure of Śachi<sup>4</sup> is Hyperion's Thea

1. Book IV

2. 3rd Canto, *Tilottamā*

3. *Endymion*, Books II and III

4. “কোথা সে ত্রিদিবনাথ”—ভাসি অশ্রুনিরে  
কহিতে লাগিল শচী,—“দারুণ বিধাতা  
হেন বাম মোর প্রতি, কিসের কারণে” etc.  
cf. *Hyperion*, Thea's speech, ll. 64-67.

Tr. “Where is the Lord of Heaven”,  
so Śachi sobbed in tears,  
“and is why cruel fate so  
hard upon me”? (1st Canto).

sobbing at Saturn's feet. Nor is this all. The broken and pathetic exclamations of Hyperion in the Sun's palace might have suggested the fiery speech of the god of storm<sup>1</sup>. One may also aver that the speech of Kārtikeya<sup>2</sup> is as much fatalistic as that of Saturn<sup>3</sup>, and that the philosophy of the god of the sea strikingly resembles that of Oceanus<sup>4</sup>. With the dignity of an epic poet Madhusūdan also follows the legitimate device of ministering to the stricken soul of Indra, the hero of the piece, by the deputation of Sleep and Dream. Finally, to throw the sadness of the overthrown Indra into prominent relief he sets him against a gloomy background for which Madhusūdan seems to have freely drawn upon the opening scene of *Hyperion* where the statuesque beauty of the Naiad corresponds to that of the Earth in *Tilottamā*.

the Naiad 'mid her reeds  
Press'd her cold finger closer to her lips.<sup>5</sup>

With this we may compare

Sleep, that Nature's soft nurse, with her companion Dream, Night's attendant, lighted on Earth who kissed her (sleep) in silence along with her (Earth) inmates.—(Tr.) *1st Canto*,<sup>6</sup> *Tilottamā*.

1. *Tilottamā* (Basumatī Edition) p. 135.

2. Op. Cit. P. 135.

3. *Hyperion*, Bk. II., ll. 138-162.

4. OP. Cit. ll. 179-192, cf. *Tilottamā*, p. 135.

5. *Hyperion*, Bk. I., ll. 13-14

6. উতরিল ধীরে

বিরাম-দায়িণী নিদ্রা—রজনীর সখী

কুহকিনী স্বপ্নদেবী স্বজনীর সহ,

বহুমতী সতী তার চরণ কমলে,

জীবকুল লয়ে নমি নীরব হইল।—১ম সর্গ, তিলোত্তমা সম্ভবকাব্য

Incidentally it may be remarked here that for his description<sup>1</sup> of the Himālayas, *Influence of Kālidāsa.* Madhusūdan harks back to Kālidāsa's *Kumār-Samvāba*, and for the composition of the hymn offered by the gods to Brahmā, he appears also to be definitely indebted to the great Indian poet.

Now, the main point of interest lies in the particular specimen of romantic effect, if any, which Michael succeeds in extracting from this rich combination of Nature and legends in his poem. Evidently we find that the poet depends upon his fancy in journeying through his epic world. But mere fancy is too insufficient to be depended upon in the creation of romantic beauty. *Kind of romantic effect.* In *Tilottamāsamvāba*, therefore, various images of beauty are made to attend on the central theme, but a new creation—a new kind of crystallisation brought about as the result of a perfect fusion between the characters and the symbolic values of natural scenes—is lamentably wanting. In the scene<sup>2</sup>, for example, where Poulami enters her bower in a mood of dejection, all that we receive from the poet is a long catalogue of names of promiscuous trees and flowers which could have been as well supplied by a text-book on Botany. Here our poet failed to put his finger, so fiery in his later works, upon the face of Nature. He could not develop that transmutative power of the mind which made Keats's "Ode to Autumn" so exquisitely beautiful, though the physical details on which Keats had to work were far less considerable than those of Madhusūdan. A purely sensuous poet like the latter cannot always reach this height; it is only poets who discover a spiritual flame, a mystic halo playing round the observed and palpable in Nature that are masters of this thrilling form of romance.

1. Op. Cit., 1st Canto, opening lines.

2. Op. Cit., 1st Canto.

In spite of these defects so incidental to an immature work, the publication of *Tilottamā-sambhava* was an epoch-making event in our literature. Its influence is clearly seen in Hemchandra's *Britra-Samhāra*. Before the Composition of *Tilottamā* it was held that

Literary significance  
of *Tilottamā* and other  
poems.

vigour as an element was impossible to our poetic diction. His energetic blank verse, therefore, came with all the suddenness of a refreshing literary surprise upon the staccato music of Kaviwallas, and upon the classical monotone of Išvar Gupta's satires. The unexpected reception of the poem encouraged Michael to improve upon his versification in a "higher endeavour" which would serve to make it an appropriate vehicle for the profoundest emotions of the human heart. Yet it will not do to forget the undertone of tenderness beneath the hard surface of his heroic poetry, nor the mastery of rhyme beneath the unrhymed verse. The pathos of the *Meghanād* need not blind us to the lyrical poignancy of *Brajāṅganā* (1861). The spirit of the old Vaiṣṇava poets still winged its way across the barrier of centuries, though the devotional strain had been lost in the flight. The old ardour could not, of course, be revived. But the situation of the frenzied Rādhā was pictured as that of an ordinary woman tormented by the pangs of separation from his beloved. And the same plastic mixture of the sweet and the sublime, as we shall notice in the *Meghanād*, is also discernible in his *Bīrāṅganā* (1862, based on the Heroic Epistles of Ovid), which purports to be a series of psychological studies in various types of earthly love.

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## CHAPTER IV

### MEGHANĀD-BADH KĀVYA

#### I

**B**Y temperament Michael was peculiarly fitted to be the father of what may be called the *sturm und Drang* school of Art in Bengali poetry. The struggle for self-expression in every department of life and thought in the country—the main feature of the Renaissance—was certainly not to be ineffectual for our poetry. The yoke of the Brahminic culture on the long-neglected dignity of man as man, dropped to the ground. With Byron as the accredited literary force, too, the spirit of revolt in the impulsive Bengalee character was inevitable. The lesson of a new materialistic civilization had taught him to believe that the body, after all, was not all dust, and that for a full realisation of life the body had its uses, perhaps as important as those of the soul.

Of such a fervent lyrical cry of primal life we have had a masterpiece in Michael's *Meghanād-badh*. It was a triumph of matter over spirit, of a revelation of unsuspected beauties that dwell in things for the observer. Our century-old ethical notions of life were, therefore, rudely shocked when we were given to understand that there was a soul of goodness in things evil<sup>1</sup>. The significance of such a revolutionary theory—though theory as such Michael did never preach—was probably lost upon that generation in which the reading public waxed rather dithyrambic upon the

A reshuffling of old values.

১. সত্য থাকে রে  
হৃদয় কু-দেহে ভবে বিধির বিধান,  
তিলোত্তমাসম্ভব-কাব্য, ১ম সর্গ।

Tr. There is always a soul of  
goodness in things evil.

poet's original performance. But the sober critic of modern Bengali literature may well pause to think if the morning did not show the day at all.

If Michael insisted on the beauty of matter, the Brāhmin poet Bihārīlā revelled in the beauty of the spirit, and the two outstanding poets composed between themselves the entire æsthetic synthesis of the age. The slogan of a Ulysses that he was a part of all that he had met in the world of fact might have held the one; the idealistic pursuit of a self-fulfilling Alastor fascinated the other. Both had an emotional subjectivity of the intensest kind. But the subjectivity of the former was somewhat classically projected, that of the latter was only romantically inclined. The art of Michael was the art of a feeling artist, the art of Bihārīlā was the art of a pure poet.

## II

The fundamental postulate, which the reader of the *Meghanādbadh* is called upon to assume in his study of the epic, is that it is, above all, the creation of a Bengalee poet inspired by foreign literature. Here it is humanity that ultimately triumphs over heroism, and it is the stamp of the Bengalee mind that looms large through foreign drapery. The large utterances of gods and heroes waft a small musical note, as of a lute heard from afar in the stillness of night, which only invites an aching pain from the sanctuary of sorrow; so that if any single element is to be held largely responsible for the specific character of the epic, it is certainly the poet's sentiment and passion which makes for its defects and merits alike.

To judge the poem as a true epic would, therefore, be to mistake the real nature of it. "A kind of

success and a kind of magnificence," says Prof. Ker, "may be attained in stories, professing to be epic, in which there is no dramatic virtue, in which every new scene and new adventure merely goes to accumulate, in immortal verse, the proofs of the hero's nullity and insignificance. This is not the epic poetry of the heroic ages."<sup>1</sup> The quality of heroism in the present poem has been tempered by the softer qualities of ordinary humanity more often than is proper to an epic. Behind the seeming poetic detachment there is, again, an unmistakable individual note which can be hardly be tolerated by the dramatic action of an epic. There are, again, instances of real epical weakness masquerading as strength through an accumulation of images and high-sounding phrases. Briefly, Michael began with an epic but ended in a lyric; or it may be said of him what Prof. Saintsbury says of Milton, that he is greatest in the lyric in his epic.

It has been too often asserted that Michael was Homeric in his adaptation of his great poem. He has, indeed, freely drawn upon Homer for his epical machinery, and has also 'engrafted the exquisite graces of Greek mythology on our own.' His passionate nature perhaps found a support in that Homeric view of life—to strive and not to yield under any circumstances, and to have the full amount of the freedom of outlook on life. It is no wonder that he was led by his classical scholarship to the tradition of ancient glory and freedom in Greece. He was impatient of discipline in literature, and the result was that he broke away from the beaten track of his predecessors, and forged and passed current a metre of his own. Like the Greek, again, he was free from the deadening influence of priests and politicians. His excursion into the worlds of Greek myths and of foreign poets was inspired by the idea of giving 'free

Greek view of life  
in *Meghanād*.

1. *Epic and Romance*, p. 17.

scope to his inventive powers', and of fitting their beauties into the frame-work of his epic.

### III

The closest approximation to Michael, if not in the real height of epical mood and temper, is the character of Rāvaṇa. In his philosophy, as in Madhusūdan's

Autobiographical  
element in Rāvaṇa.

own, there is no thought of submission to the chosen people of God even though he was too painfully conscious of the nature of his losing cause. Prostrate in grief at the loss of his brother and sons, he gathers up strength, and defiantly meets his deadly enemy. Well might he have said in the words of Milton's Satan to his puny, trembling foe, Rāma :

"Yours be the advantage all, mine the revenge."—*Paradise Lost* (*Bk. II*).

This fighting instinct and Achillean wrath are not, however, as unflagging as they are in the ancient Greek hero. Rāvaṇa cannot drown his grief in the din of the war, and is not habitually true to his cult as a warrior. On the death of Meghanād he exclaims :—

Oh archers of Lankā, quick march four-squares to the field, and let me forget this grief in the noise of the battle, if it is at all forgettable.<sup>1</sup>

This is perhaps one of the best instances which would bring the whole character of Rāvaṇa into clear relief. It is an illustration of that reconciliation of

Lyrical pathos in  
Rāvaṇa.

opposites in human nature, which is essential to the maintainance of a tragic character on the heroic plane. Few lines in Bengali Literature are more tragic than

1.

“এ কনকপুরে

ধনুর্ধর আছে যত, সাজ শীঘ্র করি

চতুরঙ্গে ! রণরঙ্গে ভুলিব এ জ্বালা—

এ বিষম জ্বালা যদি পারিবে ভুলিতে ।

(7th Canto, Lines 154-157)<sup>1</sup>

the concluding speech of Rāvaṇa, or that one<sup>1</sup> delivered before his minister who was commissioned with a request to Rāma for observing a temporary truce<sup>2</sup> for the funeral rites of his departed son. This noble, if not stoic fortitude of Rāvaṇa, who is more moved than Priam after the death of Hector, shows the perspective in which his whole character has been placed. Purged of his viciousness, if there is any viciousness at all in Michael's Rāvaṇa, he stands before us as a tree shorn of all branches and leaves :

Just as one branch after another is lopped off by the wood-man in the woods before the tree is finally felled by him, so, behold, oh God, am I being gradually made to sink in the hands of the terrible foe !<sup>3</sup>

Though favoured of Śiva, Rāvaṇa suffers so terribly, and his suffering fortified with endurance, reminds us of the unalterable decree of fate which even Jove in Homer is powerless to avert :

Sarpedon, bravest of the brave, is slain,  
The son of Jove ; yet Jove preserved him not.  
But thou, O King, this grievous wound relieve,  
Assuage the pain, and give me strength to urge  
My lycian comrades to maintain the war  
And fight myself to guard the noble dead.

—*Iliad*, Bk. XVI.<sup>4</sup>

But the note of dissatisfaction expressed by critics

1. (9th Canto, ll. 43-56).

2. We may also notice how Priam, the Trojan King, wanted a truce of eleven days for performing the last rites of Hector, cf. Bk. XXIV, *Iliad* with the last Book of the *Meghanād-badh*.

3.  
বনের মাঝারে যথা শাখাদল আগে  
একে একে কাঠুরিয়া কাটি, অবশেষে  
নাশে বৃক্ষে, হে বিধাতঃ, এ হ্রস্বত রিপু  
ভেদিত দুর্বল, দেখ, করিছে আমারে  
নিরন্তর,

(Bk. I. 491-95).

4. cf. *Meghanād-badh*, 7th Canto, 354-386.

on the representation of Rāvaṇa, as of most other heroes of the poem, turns on the excess to which the human aspect of his heroic nature has been carried.

Human failings in Rāvaṇa.

None should grudge conceding to a father, however heroic otherwise he might be, a certain susceptibility to tears and fleshquakes over the death of his beloved son. In fact, a hero, unless he were to be an abstraction, must be allowed to have the full share of the human imperfections on his head, only with sufficient control over the ordinary human tendency to be a watery-headed cry-baby, as Rāvaṇa appears to be in the first canto of the poem. In other words, the hero should subdue his tears as much as possible in order that the tragic purgation of our heart might be effected through pity and fear evoked at the sight of the hard and mysterious ways of destiny. Rāvaṇa's ironic address to the ocean<sup>1</sup>, or his poignant speech<sup>2</sup> are examples of this tragic art, though there are not many in the whole poem. To the many evidences of glaring defects in Rāvaṇa's character might be added the instance of his fainting fit ; and his subsequent accession to power through the grace of Śiva<sup>3</sup> serves to show that his heroism is rather superimposed on the genuine tenderer chords of the human heart.

No apology can serve to explain away the fact that the character of Lakṣmaṇa is anything but heroic or dignified<sup>4</sup>. Pitted against Meghanād he looks an imbecile, and the ignoble manner in which, with, the help of Māyā<sup>5</sup>, the latter murders his helpless enemy is reminiscent of Æschylus's Clytæmnestra. As the critic<sup>6</sup> remarks, at least for the sake of

Realistic standpoint in Lakṣmaṇa's character-painting.

1. 1st Canto, 297-316.
2. 1st Canto, 270-274.
3. 7th Canto, lines 121-130.
4. See Rabīndranāth's criticism of *Meghanād-badh Kāvya*.
5. Jove also commands Iris to bid Priam seek the body of Hector unattended by anybody. Iris is here equivalent to Michael's Māyā.—*cf.* The *Iliad*, XXIV with the *Meghanād*, Bk. V.
6. Rabīndranāth Tagore.

Meghanād his opponent ought to have been made worthy of his steel, for thereby he would have gained more in heroism by contrast<sup>1</sup>. But Vālmiki's Lakṣmaṇa, it may be recalled, is also not quite free from taint. He revealed an unchivalrous gesture in his assault upon Śūrpanakhā, and a murderous instinct when the order of exile was passed on Rāma by Daśaratha. An outrageous attitude to father is perhaps as reprehensible for a hero as his cowardice in facing the enemy. But if the poet misunderstood Lakṣmaṇa, his critics have misunderstood Rāma and the thoroughly realistic standpoint of his author. With violence to tradition Madhusūdan never undertook to paint Rāma in the light of a hero, and so we may pardon his thousand faults for the very human ground on which he is made to stand. He never plumes himself on borrowed feathers. His so-called weaknesses are entirely due to his over-consciousness of responsibility as a trusted brother, for which he did not like to pawn his trust on the uncertain game of rescuing his wife from such a terrible enemy. Human mind, as it is constituted, shudders at the ghastly sight of hell<sup>2</sup> in all its native hideousness, and no body would fain be born with the fore-knowledge that a terrible life of miseries is in store for him after death. To endeavour to set at rest these doubts and fears so common to an unsophisticated mind by philosophic optimism requires superhuman courage to which the 'poor Rāghava' (as he often styles himself) never pretends. Finally, it may be remembered that neither Vālmiki nor Kṛtibāsa has drawn Rāma or Lakṣmaṇa as an

1. It has been rightly held that Michael's Homeric sympathy for the Rākṣasa family had largely vitiated the picture of Lakṣmaṇa.

2. Michael has closely followed Dante in his description of the gates of Hell. Compare

"Through me you pass into the city of woe,  
Through me you pass into eternal pain."  
With Michael's

"Through this path the sinner passes into the regions of  
sorrow and of eternal pains ;" *Meghanād*, 8th Canto.

immaculate hero ; and hence it may be said that the realistic representation of such characters was quite in keeping with an age of Science which had rent asunder the cloud of myths and fables that had gathered about these characters.

That Madhusūdan could conceive perfect heroes and heroines may be justified in his representations of Meghanād and Pramīlā. Though at times their utterances seem gilded<sup>1</sup>, they are, on the whole, beautiful and fit themes for tragedy. There are other minor characters, such as the feeble Indra, the double-dealing Laksmī, the scrupulously faithful but tender Bibhī-sana, but the features such as they possess have very few points of critical interest about them.

#### IV

It is as easy to find fault with Michael's art of character-painting<sup>2</sup> as it is usual to point out the

1. Pramīlā's soliloquy on her tragic parting with Meghanād :—

জানি আমি কেন তুই গহন কাননে  
ভ্রমিস রে গজরাজ ! দেখিয়া ওগতি  
কি লজ্জায় আর তুই মুখ দেখাইবি,  
অভিমানি ! etc.

Tr. O, the king of elephants, I know why thou roamest in the wilderness, and I dare say that graceful movement of hers will put thee to blush—  
*5th Canto, 579-587.*

Again, the brilliant rapartee between Meghanād and Pramīlā (1st Canto, 703-713) is rather out of tune in a farewell scene,

সাজিলা রাবণ বধু, রাবণ-নন্দন,—  
অতুল জগতে দৌহে ; বামাকুলোত্তমা  
প্রমীলা, পুরুষোত্তম মেঘনাদবলী !

*5th Canto, Ll. 398-400.*

Tr. Now were armed Rāvana's son and his daughter-in-law, each of them unrivalled in the world, the pick among men, and the choicest among women.

2. It may be urged once more that the pensive character of the Bengalee mind is no less responsible for these portraits.



eccentricities of a genius. We can, indeed, hurl anathema on the poet in the name of such inconsistencies. A world that had creaked so long on rusty hinges was shaken to the very foundations, and hence the storm of protest and indignation that raged against the great poem. 'Rāma and his rabble' were brought down from their Olympic heights, while the demoniac Rāvaṇa and his family were raised to the skies. The divine characters of Śiva and Śivānī betrayed a departure towards the realistic side, from their traditionally idealistic attributes. Rāma was made to shed tears not such as angels weep, but as one of the mortal kind. This topsy-turvydom of our religious beliefs is, indeed, the gravamen of the charge so often levelled against the poet.

None should, of course, pretend to deny the partial truth of these complaints just as certainly none would contend that Michael was a superman without any imperfections on his head. One may regret that the conventional piety of the nation had been deliberately outraged at some places in its own epic which, as far as possible, must not run counter to its own traditions and beliefs ; and judged by the strict epic regulations most of the characters may, indeed, be pronounced as failures.

But there would have been no occasion for this realistic departure if Michael were not born "an age too soon," or if his lot were not cast in an age of glorified humanity like the preceding century. It might be devoutly wished that Michael possessed the level-headedness of Hemchandra, or that dispassionateness would have been a characteristic of that passionate poet. But the critic who is unwilling to concede these concomitant failings must be prepared to forgo the benefit of the poet's innovations. . Compromise may be an excellent rule of conduct, but little would have been accomplished in this world, were there no errant idealists

willing to stake their all on a forlorn hope, or a wild adventure. A poet with an unimpeachable sobriety of outlook, could not possibly have been the father of the blank verse in Bengali poetry. For none but a reckless and intrepid adventurer can be expected to sail in perilous seas and in 'dangerous' days; nor can a pliable and weak-kneed man dare do the heroic work of a Samson to bring the whole established system to a collapse. The strength of an Amazon was at work to break the fetters of the closed couplet, and set free the Muse of Bengali poetry in the wilds of creative imagination. "There is no future of Bengali poetry without blank verse," he remarked one day (1859) to his generous but diffident patron Jatindramohan Tagore, "but Bengali is the daughter of Sanscrit, and nothing is impossible for the daughter of such a mother." Who can over-estimate the prophetic insight, displayed in that historic conversation, in envisaging, to the very source, the latent strength of a poetic diction which had been almost silted up? To identify oneself with the mighty-mouthed organ-note of Milton, and to reproduce it in rhymeless Bengali blank verse with Sanscritic reinforcements of word-lore and imagery—a wonderful polyphonic harmony relieving the monotone of his immediate predecessors—was a unique experiment in our literature which only a poet and scholar like Michael could hope to accomplish with success. Besides his boldness in characterization, he thus set an example, like Milton, of "ancient liberty recovered to Heroic poem from the troublesome and modern bondage of riming." An entirely new world was discovered for our literature, and it would, therefore, be uncharitable to condemn the explorer to an explanation of the new angle of vision he had taken in the course of the hazardous journey.

Nor need we be so gratuitous in condoning the poet for his alleged weaknesses in character-painting.

Michael's epic ideal  
vindicated.

Classicists, both ancient and modern, will no doubt vie with one another to return an unfavourable verdict on the poet for the

many unheroic actions of his heroes. A weeping Rāvaṇa, an ungenerous Lakṣmaṇa, and an emasculated Rāma are liable to be condemned, not because they are cut loose from history, and are, therefore, calculated to hurt our religious susceptibilities, but only because they are unfit for great actions as demanded by an epic. Yet it is fair to say that caution must be exercised even in this plea for condemnation, because ideals of heroism, after all, are not absolute. "The heroic ideal of epic", says Prof. Ker, "is not attained by a process of abstraction and separation from the meannesses of familiar things. The magnificence and aristocratic dignity of epic is conformable to the practical and ethical standards of the heroic age; that is to say, it tolerates a number of things that may be found mean and trivial by academicians."<sup>1</sup>

On the epic poet's allegiance to the source of the plot the same critic<sup>2</sup> remarks: "The heroes, even if they can be identified as historical, may retain in epic nothing of their historical character, except such qualities as fit them for great actions. Their conduct in epic poetry may be very far unlike their actual demeanour in true history; their greatest works may be thrust into a corner of the epic, or barely alluded to, or left out altogether. Their greatness in epic may be a quite different kind of greatness from that of their true history." It was enough for the poet that he found in Rāvaṇa something which moved him to admiration<sup>3</sup>, to a compulsion and influence that required him to make the story again in his own way, not to interpret history but to make a drama of his own filled somehow with the passion and strength of his mind. It does not matter much, therefore, if the

The legacy of his challenge.

1. *Epic and Romance*, p. 17.

2. Loc. cit.

3. "The idea of "Rāvaṇa" elevates and kindles my imagination. He was a grand fellow,"—Michael's letter to a friend.

characters depicted have been faithful or otherwise to the source of the plot so long as in some form or other, the power of the poet's *national heredity* is allowed to pass into his work. For Rāma still lives as a god, and Rāvaṇa as a veritable demon in the memories of our people, but Bengali literature achieved to the bargain a singular glory by the poet's remarkable innovations.

## V

We may now inquire how, among other borrowings<sup>1</sup>, Michael has 'engrafted the exquisite graces of Greek mythology on our own.' The conflict in the *Meghanād* as in the *Iliad*, is sustained by an internecine feud between the gods themselves. Jove and Juno are the counterparts of Śiva and Umā, while Pallas may be taken as sister to Māyā in Madhusūdan. The parallelism is further heightened by Juno going to Jupiter on Mount Ida in the *Iliad* (Bk. VIII). Juno always supports the cause of the Greeks, just as Śivānī in Madhusūdan helps Rāma in slaying Rāvaṇa (Bk. II). Pallas goes out fully equipped to fight with the Greeks, and Juno helps her in the campaign. But Jove interferes with her progress, so that ultimately it is the gods, and not men, that come to a fight among themselves. Thus there are two sets of gods represented as wire-pullers who, through their machinations, keep alive the racial fire between the two sets of warring tribes, the Greeks and the Trojans, the Aryans and the non-Aryans. The Olympian Jove always parading his powers, however, yields place in Madhusūdan to a more sober and considerate personality in Śiva on the heights of Kailāsa cautious in the exercise of his powers, and prepared like a

1. The use of the God "Prabhanjan" (Bk. II, 550-574) may be compared with "Aeolus", in *Aeneid* Bk. I. cf. Pramila's expedition (Bk. III) with Camilla's in Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*, Bk. XI; Pramila's pleasure-garden (Bk. III) with Armida's garden in *Jerusalem Delivered* (Bk. XII), cf. Bk. V, 370-386 with *Paradise Lost*, Bk. V (Adam and Eve awakened from sleep). cf. Bk. VIII with Virgil's *Aeneid* VI, and Dante's *Inferno*, Bk. V; cf. Bk. IX with the *Iliad*, Bk. XXIV.

chivalrous husband of comparatively modern times, to allow the female hand to settle his domestic affairs or foreign politics.

But the glorification of man's power by Madhusūdan has been lost sight of by some of his critics who hold that an avenging spirit is ever on the watch on Rāvaṇa's family, and drives him on to fresh acts of wickedness. They assert that he suffers for no fault of his own, and that he acts only because of his honest indignation at the wounded honour of his sister. But really speaking, does he not set the ball rolling in this tragic game of fate? Was it imperative on him to behave as impiously as he did towards Sītā<sup>1</sup>? Was the abduction of a helpless lady wheedled out of her house by a false appeal to her tender sentiments the only course left open to his heroic impulse for making sufficient amends for the alleged loss of his reputation? However sympathetic may be the attitude of our poet to Rāvaṇa, the fact remains that he is essentially human, and is, therefore, naturally inclined to seek to fasten upon some other agency, be it fate or fate's instrument, the consequences of his own misdeeds. As a matter of fact, it is his own vicious inclinations combined with the promptings of the avenging spirit, which cause the evil to be perpetrated. This point is clearly brought out in the conversation between Clytæmnestra and the chorus after the death of Agamemnon

- I.  
 দূরে গেল জটাভূট ; কমণ্ডলু ছার !  
 রাজরথি-বেশে মূঢ় আমার তুলিল  
 স্বর্ণরথ, কহিল যে কত দুষ্টমতি,  
 কত রোষে গজ্জি, কত হুমধুর স্বরে,  
 অরিলে, সরমে ইচ্ছি মরিতে সরমা !

Bk. IV.

Tr. :—The holy jar and the accursed matted hair were kept aside. The devil in the garb of a royal charioteer placed me on the golden chariot. Alternately between roaring in anger and cajoling in sweet tunes, what, oh Saramā, was not uttered by the rogue, the memory of which would now kill me with shame ! Bk. IV—*Meghanād*, Bk. IV.

Cf. Helen's speech to aged Priam on the eve of the fight.

in Æsychlus, and indirectly by Madhusūdan in the conversation between Chitrāngadā and Rāvaṇa after the death of Birabāhu. Homer, on the other hand, left everything to the care of his Olympic gods and very little to his own heroes. Not a mouse could stir in his world of its own free will. Almost every act in the *Iliad* received the seal of the god's approval, so that ultimately the whole affair reacted on the gods themselves. But Ravana's misdeed satisfies neither gods nor men, and he alone is to account for it. No evidence excepting his occasional outburst could be found to prove that the whole trouble is an emanation from a previous curse, or that in spite of himself he is caught in the net of fate. Madhusūdan's theory of fate, we may therefore conclude, is not truly Homeric, but is based on the general principle of good and evil.

## VI

Finally, it may be interesting to examine if there is any Greek element in Michael's heroic ideal of epic.

Hellenic exclusive-  
ness in Meghanād.

As we have seen, Michael was one who struggled hard in many spheres of life, and in the end shipwrecked himself, as it were, under the driving force of an irresistible destiny. 'He knew, like the heathen, that life brought its contest, but he expected from it also the crown of all contest ; no proud one ; no jewelled circlet flaming through Heaven above the height of the unmerited throne ; only some few leaves of the wild olive, cool to the tired brow, through a few years of peace'.<sup>1</sup> The epitaph that Madhusūdan left behind him to be inscribed as 'a crown of all contest' on his tomb, was, indeed, a bunch of 'some few leaves of wild olive cool to the tired brow' of the hero in him when he, like his own Meghanād, closed his eyes in eternal sleep after life's fitful fever was over<sup>2</sup>. The

1. *The crown of wild olive*—Ruskin.

2. দাঁড়াও, পথিকবর, ইত্যাদি—(Stop, traveller, etc). Cf. *Siste Viator*—a common inscription on a tombstone ; see also the epitaph left by Shakespeare.

irrepressible spirit of struggle which will in the long run merit the just tributes of the people over a peaceful grave—this is the real spirit of Hellas which seems to have thrilled his imagination. Born though he was in an essentially scientific age, he preferred to see life steadily and see it whole. Like the Greek he endeavoured to stand nearer to the morning of the world than we do now, and he took every phenomenon of nature as “transformed into divine and conscious agents, to be propitiated by prayer, interpreted by divination, and comprehended by passions and desires identical with those which stir and control mankind”;<sup>1</sup> and like the Greek hero, again, Meghanād cared to see nothing beyond his home, king and country in the perspective of his life.

To the Greeks, again, the anthropomorphic vision of nature was an after-thought, an emanation of the intense moments of their life. Nature, as it has been already shown, was always peopled with gods, and often with the awful personality of Jove. It served, as in the *Meghanād-badh* as an appropriate background of human thoughts and emotions, or of any convulsive situation in life pregnant with tragic possibilities. In fact, it is the intense sense of the tragic which opens one's eyes to the prismatic tints of nature's glory. The representation of this relation between these two apparently diverse worlds with their myriad romantic issues calls for that myth-making faculty which presupposes the highest amount of imaginative vigour in the poet. Homer and Milton possessed this in an eminent degree. Madhusūdan has also testified to it in his delineation of the character of Sītā recalling under the stress of a painful separation from Rāmachandra, the happy days of the Dandaka forest. To her familiar womanly impulses the poet has joined her desire for a close association with nature, and has

Treatment of  
nature.

1. L. Dickinson, *The Greek view of life*, p. 8.

thereby created a delicate nature-myth<sup>1</sup>—the expression of a blessed mood of spiritual harmony.

The humanisation of nature by the Greek mind followed from its fundamental conception of man as the measure of all things in the universe. Man was neither a beast, nor a God, for the Greek mind was not conscious of the distinction between body and soul. The dust and the deity were equally unknown to it ; and probably the conscious imitation of such a philosophy explains the absence, in Madhusūdan's "Inferno"<sup>2</sup>, of any shadow of Virgil's sublime speculation on the transmigration of human soul, or on the grand oversoul of the universe. Of a future life after death the Greek mind was blissfully ignorant, or at best (as in Euripides) definitely uncertain. The Greeks were content with a happy home, a bright and brisk society, a foe worthy of the steel, and above all, with the prospect of a decent burial by their own fellow-beings, either at home or abroad. "Free-heartedness, and graciousness, and undisturbed trust and requited love, and the sight of the peace of others, and ministry to their pain—these and the blue sky above them, and the sweet waters and flowers of the earth beneath," are, according to Ruskin, the good luck to which the Greeks were born, and they resigned themselves to it throughout their whole life. With such general passions, thoughts, and feelings of men, it is to be noticed, Rāvaṇa and his whole family at once identify themselves in the *Meghanād-badh*.

1. নব লতিকার সতি ! দিতাম বিবাহ  
তরু সহ ; চুম্বিতাম, মঞ্জরিত যবে  
দম্পতি, মঞ্জরীবৃন্দে, আনন্দে সম্ভাষি  
নাতিনী বলিয়া সবে ! গুহুরিলে অলি  
নাতিনী-জামাই বলি বরিতাম তারে !

*Meghanād-badh, 4th Canto.*

Tr. Between the new creepers and trees, my good lady, I used to bring about a union ; kissed the blossoms when they flowered and called them (blossoms) cousins, and welcomed the humming bee as their lord.

2. cf. Virgil's *Aeneid*, VI ; Dante's "Inferno", V.



Again, as we have seen, the halo of divinity traditionally hanging about Rāmchandra has been rudely dispelled, and he is reduced to the level of his poor myrmidons. Rāvaṇa has none of the viciousness purposely ascribed to him by Vālmiki; an affectionate father, a true king, a great warrior swayed by passions, he was, above all, a man rather than a hero of the epic age; Meghanād is a dutiful son, a loving husband, and a noble patriot, nobler and braver than Hector; and far more glorious than Andromache is our Pramīlā, who, though modelled upon Homer, Virgil, and Tasso, yet remains for her excellent local colour, an essentially Indian creation not less heroic than Padmini, Durgābati or the Lakshmi Bai of Jhānsi<sup>1</sup>. The pathos of the *Meghanād-badh* is, therefore, the pathos of thwarted passions and baffled endeavours. The burden of Rāvaṇa's lamentation in the funeral scene is a forlorn cry of despair, of high hopes razed to the ground. That an old father should be destined, even in the ordinary world, to survive the spectacle of the funeral rites of his beloved son, is harrowing in itself, and more so when the victim, dying for no fault of his own, is seen followed up to the pyre by his devoted wife Pramīlā. The immensity of grief is so universal and stunning that we forget the blemishes in Rāvaṇa's character when he stops with a casual reference to Meghanād's mother for whom he finds of no words of solace. In a war where God and man conspire to put down a great hero, our sympathy naturally goes out to the weaker side, and even his failings, if there be any, call for pity rather than contempt, for the fall of such a towering figure is as tragic as the fall of a great empire awful in its magnificence and looking all the more colossal in its ruins.

1. The prominent part played by this heroine during the Sepoy Mutiny which took place only a few years before the composition of the *Meghanād-badh* might have suggested, according to Mr. Jogindralāl Basu, the high characterization of Pramīlā.

## CHAPTER V

### MADHUSŪDAN'S POETIC ART.

**P**OPE'S good-humoured criticism on epic poetry of which the arch-satirist has made nothing more or less than a dull, soulless machinery is hardly true of any great epic. The test of a really great epic is the presence of a pervading human sympathy which no man "without a genius" can possess or show. In fact, it is through this that Homer and Virgil, Dante and Tasso have made their first and last appeal.

In Madhusūdan also this is the supreme point of interest which, as we have said, he need not have borrowed wholly from his illustrious masters as the *sine qua non* of his tragedy. The *Iliad* is largely a song of the spear; the *Æneid* of a great soul shaping its definite end through divine inspiration, and the *Meghanād-badh* of a great hero shining by its humanity in a world of woes. "As it is," said Michael to his friend Rājñārayan about his epic, "you must not expect any battle scenes. A great pity; the Muses before everything is my motto." Indeed, in the *Meghanād-badh* we get not so much a long series of battles as all their possible consequences, not so much of any heated bandying of words as the consuming flames of fire that follow on their heels and reduce everything to ashes. At the very outset, we feel we are landed in an atmosphere of war-weariness, of the desolate magnificence, as it were, of the pageant of human life which has just experienced the ruinous hand of a great tempest, and which patiently waits for a greater one with darker clouds gathering overhead. The tragic issues of the *Iliad* are often diversified by the uncertain tide of victory moving alternately

between the belligerent forces. The final calamity is delayed so long that a strain seems to be put upon the anticipations of a modern reader. Unlike Homer, Michael condenses his action into a fewer scenes, and without going into the minutiae of real life, which is a great merit of Homer, artistically selects some promising situations charged with deep pathos. To have disengaged these essential scenes from a mass of accidental adjuncts, and to have produced a strong impression of beauty under given conditions requires a great nicety of sympathetic temperament ; and it is thus that Madhusūdan reaches the height of tragic art.

The more ethereal, evanescent, more refined and sublime part of art, says Hazlitt, is the observation of nature through the medium of sentiment and passion<sup>1</sup>, as each object is the symbol of the affections and a link in the chain of our endless being. But the unravelling of this mysterious web of thought and feeling is in the Muse's gift, (and Muses before everything else—that was our poet's motto) namely, in the power of that trembling sensibility which is awake to every change and every modification of its ever-varying impressions, that "thrills in each nerve, and lives along the line". This medium of sentiment and passion which marks his preference for romantic treatment as opposed to the classical standpoint of his master Milton, is the "open sesame" of Madhusūdan's tragic art. But as we have said in the last chapter, it has made his epical outlook assume a distingly lyrical colour. The only

1. Cf. The beginning of the 2nd canto. The second canto begins with a description of Evening :—"The fragrant wind blew in every direction whispering to every one, what riches have you got by kissing which flowers ?" On this description the poet wrote to Rājnarain,—"These lines will no doubt recall to your mind the lines—'And whisper whence they stole these balmy spoils' of Milton, and the lines

"Like the Sweet south  
That breathes upon a bank of violets  
Stealing and giving odour"

of Shakespeare, and the poet added, "Is not kissing a more romantic way of getting the thing than stealing ?"—Letter to Rājnarain.

explanation of the predominance of sentiment in the epic is his peculiarly emotional temperament which is the hall-mark of his racial genius. Homer's natural sympathy for the Greeks did not blind him to the heroism of the Trojans. In characterization, in the economy of epic art he showed at least a fair amount of dispassionateness which our poet shook off with a gusto all his own. Meghanād's greatness has been built over the grave of Lakṣmaṇa as a hero, while there is nothing in the *Iliad* to show that Hector is struck down by Achilles in a manner short of fair play. With all his apparent ambition and preparations, therefore, Madhusūdan could not make of his epic an *Iliad* of the victorious Aryans. On the side of Rāma he overcoloured the help of the gods so far as to magnify the real stuff in Rāvaṇa and his great son; and thus he contributed to the pathos of the tragedy at the sacrifice of poetic impartiality.

Madhusūdan's tragic art reaches its climax in the fourth canto of the epic which, though not organically connected with the plot, yet shines by its own intrinsic merit. It presents a prospect of Lankā which we find all of a sudden bursting into a mood of gaiety at the installation of Meghanād as the captain-designate of the Royal Army. Set against a luminous background of hope and pride there is, however, a dark spot made darker still through the film of sighs and tears hanging over it. The wind that blows here, if far less impetuous than the 'West wind', carries the seeds of a mighty doom visiting a rotten state of things. Not far off from the scene the waters of the sea, apparently in sympathy with Sitā's bewailing, sing dirges that will for ever be sung round the foot of the epitaph of Meghanād on the desolate shore of the Ganges. And the mournful figure of Sitā, like that of Ruth weeping in this alien field is, through her miseries and hard penance, unconsciously digging a grave for one not less glorious than herself.

Tragic art of the  
fourth Canto of  
*Meghanād-badh.*

Sitā is, in this respect, the analogue of Io in Æschylus's *Prometheus* and of Cassandra in *Introduction of Sitā. Agamemnon*. A passive victim of misfortune, each of the two characters is a symbol and articulation of the background in her particular drama; further they are vital to the economy of the drama, in that they sum up in themselves the future calamities which the subsequent events are to expound. In dignity of tone, and firmness of heart, Sitā is more akin to Cassandra than to Io who is broken by her calamity. But the lamentations of Sitā are not charged with the lofty indignation of Cassandra, though the pathos of the scene that passes between Sitā and Saramā, and the sense of fatalism following upon it are none the less remarkable. Then even as she speaks, the pang of inspiration thrills her. Her speech before Saramā in this part of the epic (Bk. IV) sums up, through a series of dream-pictures, the story of the accursed race of Rāvaṇa, and through its artistic blending of visions evoked from the past with insight piercing into the immediate future, affects the imagination more intensely than any other piece of tragic declamation in the whole epic. The broken exclamations of Cassandra, and the piteous but dignified bewailings of Sitā express the intense agonies of two innocent victims.

Again, the abduction of Sitā in the fourth Canto described with becoming epic dignity has a parallel scene in Virgil's *Æneid* (Bk. II),  
 Lyrical character of Sitā. representing the picture of Cassandra dragged by her dishevelled hair. The outlines of the picture in Madhusūdan are as bold and firm as in Virgil, though the details are not fully worked out. But Virgil is a greater artist than our poet, and by the side of Cassandra either of Virgil or of Æschylus, Sitā appears to be too lyrical, and the exclusively personal nature of her grief takes away much from the larger interest of the epic.

From what we have said above, it is clear that by the introduction of Sitā in the fourth canto Madhusūdan, like Æschylus through Cassandra in *Agamemnon*, has really achieved a triumph of tragic art. Without Sitā the tragedy would not have been artistically complete just as without Cassandra the famous Greek tragedy is nothing but blood and horror. Incidentally Sitā serves as a foil to Rāvaṇa's character, and justifies his miseries in the same manner as the very presence of Cassandra does in regard to Agamemnon. Both Sitā and Cassandra, by their inspired utterances, considerably relieve the melodramatic vein, and lift the audience to an atmosphere of moral grandeur. Each, in her own degree, inspires a sense of the infinite value of personal uprightness and of domestic purity together with a reverence for the sanctities which reach out into eternity. Thus Madhusūdan's sympathy for the sinner could not bring him to see eye to eye with the wages of sin.

The question now arises whether Michael's poetic art can, after all, be designated as classical or romantic. The note of subjectivity has been discovered to be the main source of inspiration for him. The medium of sentiment and passion, in other words, the dominance of the imagination animates his portrait-painting. Michael piles up images on images until he finds that the impression of artistic completeness has been sufficiently produced. The realisation of one picture leads to the invocation of another group of cognate pictures. The advantage of such a method is that it gives 'free scope to the inventive powers of the imagination', but it is apt to run the risk of calling up the irrelevant detail which is so fatal to the effect of poetic art.

As we have remarked at the outset, Michael only revelled in the beauties of the outer world. It was

Classical trappings. the work of an exceptionally suggestive mind that summoned a world of parallels in classical trappings for his own theme and figures, and he pressed them all into the service of his own artistic taste and emotion. He has established and identified his characters for all they are worth as epical personages, and the reader can be moved to a sense of hatred or love for them.

He does not, however, create the thrill of the strange and the unknown, which is the central element of Romantic art. He has only used his imagination to deal with the eternal verities of life with a pathos and dignity of utterance that lend them once more a new potency of appeal. There is an undeniable sweetness, because of its poignant sadness, in the concluding speech of Rāvana before the funeral pyre of his great son. But it is not romantic because in the final appeal the impression of strangeness does not outweigh that of familiarity or recognition. Throughout the whole work a greater emphasis has been laid clearly upon the familiar notion of the moral government of the universe. It is an old tale that comes back to us in a new setting and with a renewed force of appeal. Like the Greek drama it is also studded with spiritual suggestions, with reflections on the mystery of fate shadowing man at every step of his life. "Māyā" is nothing but the dark figure of destiny which has been kept in the background, and towards which the doomed hero unconsciously moves with slow but certain steps. Yet the underlying lyrical cry, one may repeat, can never be lost in the more majestic epical notes, though this lyricism does not ultimately rise above the appeal of a classical tragedy.

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## INTERCHAPTER II

### LIFE OF

HEMCHANDRA BANDYOPADHYAYA (1838-1904)

**T**HE earlier and later chapters of Hemchandra's life are reminiscent of Thomas Hood's belief in a kinship between poetry and poverty, both of which, he points out, are, in more respects than one, "as like each other as two P's." For like most poets Hemchandra was condemned to struggle against adverse circumstances in his early life. In an essentially Hebraic nature such as Hemchandra possessed, keen struggles, however, induce a stoic fortitude and a philosophic resignation to the supreme Power, which is truly oriental ; and it is perhaps this biographical fact which is, to some extent, responsible for the strong ethical flavour in Hemchandra's poetry.

Hemchandra's  
early life.

Born in 1838 to a poor family of Gulitā in the district of Hugli, Hemchandra received his primary education in the village school, and was then sent to Hindu College at Calcutta by his maternal uncle. The young student passed the F. A. examination of the Calcutta University which had then been brought into existence only a few months ago. But under stress of poverty he had to cut short his academic career soon after he had joined the third year class of the Presidency College, and he found his legs in a clerkship of Rs. 50 per month in the Military Auditor General's Office. Yet the divine discontent which is 'the secret spur of all enterprise' urged him to seek a more ambitious career in life. He qualified for the profession of Law in 1859, and three years later he was appointed junior Munsif at Howrah and Serampore Circle. But the orders of his official transfer to a distant station, which his grand-mother did not like him to carry out, led to his resignation of the post and to his contact with public life as an independent lawyer, and with the republic of letters as a promising poet.

His career.

As a student of Hindu College Hemchandra composed his first poem, *Chintātarāṅgini*. By adopting it as a text-book for the B. A. examination, the Calcutta University recognised even this modest performance, and thereby encouraged the shy worth of the budding poet who pursued his literary work with greater success, as the following list will show :—

His poetical works.



1.	Chintātarāṅgini	...	...	1860-'61.
2.	Biabāhu Kāvya	...	...	1861-'66.
3.	Bhāratbiṣayak Kabitā	...	...	1870-'71.
4.	Britra-Samhāra	...	...	1875-'77.
5.	Ās'ā-Kānan	...	...	1876-'77.
6.	Das'amahābidyā	...	...	1882.

It is sad to reflect that the evening of the poet's life should have been clouded over with poverty and privations. What

His old age. was even worse was that he now lost his eye-sight; and thus handicapped by poverty, disease and old age the blind poet left for Benares. He fell on dire days, the only source of his income being the sale of his books, which was evidently too small for his needs. But the generous intercession of his friends secured for him a humble pension of Rs. 25 per month from the local Government. Perhaps the old poet, in his utter wretchedness, thanked his stars for having won the noble distinction, as it were, of a poet-laureate of his country. He died in 1904.

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## CHAPTER VI

### HEMCHANDRA'S EARLY POEMS

**T**HE mental outlook of Hemchandra is more pragmatic than poetic. A level-headed thinker, an earnest moralist who began with certain Christian ideas, he holds almost the same position with regard to the Vedantic trend of thought of the century as was held by Milton under the inspiration of the Bible. In his sympathies and aspirations, in his attempt at reform, in the nicety of his balanced thoughts he comes near to the Reformist school introduced by Rājā Rām-mohan. But early in life he betrays a note of Byronism which made its influence felt on many of his contemporaries. The vogue of Byron was at its height at that time. "He (Byron) was," says Prof. Saintsbury, "one of the dominant influences and determining causes of the French Romantic movement; in Germany, though the failure of literary talent and activity of the first order made his school less important, he had great power over Heine, its one towering genius; and he was almost the sole master of young Russia, young Italy, young Spain, in poetry."

This stream of influence naturally found its way into young Bengal too, which was then rapidly assimilating western culture and mode of thinking. To Hemchandra its appeal was as strong as it was facile, and we find that it influenced the composition of his first poem *Chintātarāṅgiṇī*. Apparently, the theme of the poem is elegiac, based as it is on the tragic end of his early friend Śrīśchandra. The poet works out the plot vividly, but places a mouthful of mouldy platitudes at the end—an indication, though very crude, of the genius which was evidently bound to

Byron's influence  
in his early poetry.

In *Chintātarāṅgiṇī*.

be more Hebraic than artistic. The pathos of the various dramatic situations, the relation between the husband and the wife, between friends and the world have been brought out in a rather prosaic manner. The pitiful and supplicating charges levelled against her husband by Jagatārā, the heroine of the piece, read like a Bengali version of Julia's letter to Don Juan :—

Why should it be otherwise ? A thousand and one are the occupations of man—travel, war, commerce, politics and agriculture—so that the happiness of woman is nothing more than a gambling to man<sup>1</sup>.

And Byron says :—

“Man's love is of man's life a thing apart,  
'Tis woman's whole existence ; man may range  
The court, camp, church, the vessel, and the mart ;  
Sword, gown, gain, glory, offer in exchange  
Pride, fame, ambition, to fill up his heart,  
And few there are whom these cannot estrange.”

*Don Juan* (CXCIV).

A comparative study of these two works, however, reveals the distinctiveness of Hemchandra's own standpoint from which he explains Hemchandra's treatment of the problem. the profound sense of Hindu married life. Yet in accordance with the fashion of the age, he would like to meet Byron on his own ground with what seems to our society a revolting estimate of woman. Nor is this all that is ringed round with pessimism. The glaring vices of man and the sins of the world have been put forward as a plea for an escape from the world, and for seeking shelter like Cowper in the mercy of God. The general trend is, therefore, a veritable counsel of despair made up of the futile regrets

- |    |                                  |                  |
|----|----------------------------------|------------------|
| 1. | কেন বা হইবে আন                   | পুষ্করের শত তান  |
|    | শত্রু, শাস্ত্র, সংগ্রাম, ভ্রমণ । |                  |
|    | রাজনীতি রাজ্যদ্বার               | ব্যবসা কৃষিবিচার |
|    | দ্যুতক্রীড়া রমণীরঞ্জন ।         | (চিন্তাতরঙ্গিনী) |

of man chafing against the irresistible power of destiny which is writ large on our ruined hopes and lost schemes. The Earth, again, has been depicted as a hell where man is the devil, and all his religions are but apologies for his failure to have a direct communion with God. He is a fool of his "little systems," and his vision is closed to all that is truly beautiful. In short, the hero appears to be a young contemporary "Brahmo" only ridden by a christian sense of sin and a frank idealism so prevalent in that age.

It will thus be seen, as we proceed further, that Hemchandra is the first poet in our literature to have dealt with what is conventionally called the mystery of existence, one of the speculative problems of the age.

His interpretation of life is more sensible than emotional, more ethico-religious than poetic. His imagination does not always crawl on earth as it never soars too high when dealing with the hard facts of life. He is well-nigh Wordsworthian when he says :

Without leaving the ground for a moment  
I have traversed over the three worlds—  
Heaven, Hell and the Earth.<sup>1</sup>

The poem is an excellent medley in which the pertinent problems of the day feebly struggle for solution. A protest against idolatry directly due to the rise of Brahmoism<sup>2</sup>, a plea for patriotism, social

The poem as a mirror of the age.

1. যাইনি নিবেষণ  
ছাড়িয়া এ ধরাতল  
তবুও ভ্রমিহু স্বর্ণ, মর্ত্য, রম্যাতল।—কবিতাবলী
2. দুর্বল মানব মন সেই সে কারণ।  
পুঞ্জ ভবদেব করি প্রতিমা গঠন ॥  
সাকার স্বরূপে তাই নিরাকার ভাবে।  
মাটিপূজা করি ভাবে মোক্ষপদ পাবে ॥  
একবার এরা যদি প্রকৃতি মন্দিরে।

The inheritor of a splendid baronage, Manfred feels out of his element in this earth, and the weak spot that he discovers is not in nature, but in the very making of his own being.

How beautiful is all this visible world !  
 How glorious in its action and itself !  
 But we who name ourselves its sovereigns, we  
 Half dust, half deity, alike unfit  
 To sink or soar, with our mixed essence make  
 A conflict of its elements, and breathe  
 The breath of degradation and of pride  
 Contending with low wants and lofty will,  
 Till our mortality predominates,  
 And men are—what they name not to themselves,  
 And trust not to each other.—*Manfred*.

The source of the tragedy in *Manfred*, unlike that in *Chintātaranginī*, is mainly psychological, the distemper of Manfred's soul, if we choose to call it so, being only the culmination of the influence of his environment. In him there was undoubtedly a morbid predilection for a communion with the supernatural, but the impulse was fed by his romantic love of nature, which was ultimately a reaction of his scorn of mankind. He wanted the bliss of self-oblivion, and when the study of various arts and sciences failed of its purpose, the need of the invocation of the supernatural was insistent upon him. Here the cynical philosopher is the poet himself, and in his pathetic wailings we seem to hear the note of a child vainly crying for the moon. But though Manfred began with what he thought to be the widowed race of man, he was not sorry to support in his last hour the dignity of his soul on the solid rock of 'superior science—penance, and daring.'

And length of watching, strength of mind and skill  
 In knowledge of our fathers—when the earth

Saw men and spirits walking side by side  
And gave ye no supremacy.—*Manfred*.

The quintessence of humanity gave him a terrible strength in the end to fight out his losing cause with the demons who vanished like mists before his rising brilliance that was too soon to fade into the cold embers of death.

His return to  
humanity.

A comparison of these two poems may thus be justified only on some specific points, namely, both are poems pre-eminently of despair, though differing in their degree and scope, and both belong to an important epoch when men's outlook on man was in the process of a radical change. A strain of unreality the pervasive influence of which is felt in all the early poems of the English Romantic movement dominates these poems. Beyond these similarities, they walk in widely different grooves in their aims and actions. A certain egotism rendered poignant by a mordant and cynical wit is of the essence of *Manfred*, while his comrade *Narasakhā* (in *Chintā-taraṅgiṇī*) labours under a heavy load of despair born of a vision of the futility of human life. Both are out on prying into the origin of things, but the former is decidedly Kantian, and depends on nothing excepting his own "immortal mind." The latter does not trust to himself, but resigns his spirit to the mercy of God. He raises the phantom of an impossible ideal, but has little strength to lay it except by taking to suicide. He is an impatient idealist whose lot was cast in the stirring days of nineteenth-century Bengal, but who unfortunately failed to stand the mighty shock of the new age. He took into his head the different issues of the period, political, social and religious, none of which he had the capacity to handle or avoid. An unhealthy social conscience, a casuistry of the intellect feverishly anxious to see everything

*Manfred and Chintā-taraṅgiṇī* compared and contrasted.

ready according to its received ideas, is at the root of his deeper agonies.

The aspirations of my mind are left unfulfilled. Humanity remains as impure as ever. My love for society has found no outlet, and selfishness, envy and jealousy have not yet been killed. My mind is still impious and unfit for the path of righteousness.<sup>1</sup>

Even nature which to Manfred is a source of benignant consolations has no cure for him.

What do I behold now ! Where had I been, and where am I now ! Where are those pure nectar-like waters and that charming and delightful region !<sup>2</sup>

As an outcome of *Manfred's* probable influence and as a mirror of the age, the poem is no doubt an interesting document. But on the side of poetic

Artistic blemishes of  
*Chintātarangini*.

qualities it is an unprofitable study. There is no art in the narrative, no pathos to exalt the tragic, and no feeling to make the thoughts human. The poet tells the tale not as an artist but as a moralist.

## II.

Byron's martyrdom to the cause of liberty was transfigured in his death which occurred while he was fighting for the liberation of Greece. The consecrated spirit of Narasakā, despite its morbid nature, is in the

Hemchandra's  
patriotism.

1 মনের বাসনা কই পুরাতে নাহি নু ।  
মানবমণ্ডলী কই পবিত্র করি নু ॥  
ঐতিবারি সমাজেতে সোঁচিলাম কই ।  
স্বার্থ, দ্বেষ, পরহিংসা নাশিলাম কই ॥  
কই আপনার মন নিরমল হল ।  
কই ধর্মপথে মন স্থির হয় বল ॥—*চিন্তাতরঙ্গিনী*

2 মরি কি দেখি নু কোনখানে ছি নু  
এগন কোথায় রই ।  
কোথা নিরমল সেই সুধাজল  
সে মোহন পুরী কই ॥ *Ibid.*

same sense Byronic. The craving for liberty led Rangalāl and Hemchandra—to name only the first two among the early great poets of the century—to inflame, on a definite principle, the patriotic impulse of our people, just as Heine and Börne awakened the national consciousness of United Germany. Whether this spirit is due entirely to any foreign literary influence as we have already seen, or to the exigencies of political circumstances, the fact remains that it was conceived in a mood of self-criticism which is found more predominant in Hemchandra than in any of his contemporaries. His technique of schooling in “Europe and Asia” is admonitory being, as it is, a poetic revulsion of his feeling towards our fatal fatalism<sup>1</sup>. His poems on social reform may also be brought under this head. A second way in which he evokes our sense of self-respect is by comparing the downfall of India from her proud position of eminence with the rapid progress of Europe, Japan, and America which had been till then sunk in ignorance and barbarism. To this class belong his “poems on Indian themes” to which we shall have occasion to refer in the next chapter. But belonging, as he apparently does, to the school of Rāmmohan he draws his best inspiration from the ancient glories of India, and so in this respect he is second only to Rāngalāl Banerjea.

Birabāhu Kāvya is a poem of this type.

1. তোমাদের দিবাসক্যা প্রাতঃকাল রজনী।

সকলি সমান জ্ঞান।—

আছে কি না আছে প্রাণ

অন্ধ অধর্মের প্রায়

ডাক খালি বিধাতায়

বলিলে অদৃষ্ট দোষী তুষ্ট হবে তখনি।—“ইউরোপও আসিয়া”

Tr.:—Day and night, morning and evening have no difference for you. Whether you are alive at all, is a point of doubt. Like a blind and decrepit being, you can only invoke the mercy of God, and will be pleased when you are told that fate alone is responsible for your misery.—“Europe and Asia.”



Its moral is that nothing short of a courageous sacrifice on the part of our heroes can bring back our past honour and happiness. The mōtif of this poem is the apparent plea of setting up a new Hindu Empire. An imaginary abduction of a Hindu queen of Ambar by some Mahomedans rouses the poet's indignation, and he makes of it an epic capital which, in thrilling adventures of the chivalrous king, in the vision of weird spirits and in his fight for damsels against dragons, reminds us of the gravity of the mediæval romances. Love, war, chivalry, and honour to womanhood—these are the mediæval features which joined with a simple narrative make the poem a romance. In fact, it is like the dream of a mediæval knight inspired to rescue a helpless lady in danger at the hands of dragons. Allegorically speaking, the female anchorite who appeared before Birabāhu in his pleasure-garden, and urged him to prepare himself for his duty seems to be the embodied conscience of ancient India pressing for self-expression against the degenerate influence of Westernism. The power displayed in describing the horrors of war, and the fierceness of natural convulsions, not very striking in itself, is full of promise. The supernatural agency which the poet employs as a means for effecting the poetic justice as also for enhancing the grandeur of romance has been used with great success, though it appears for the first time in his poetry.

In every respect the poem is no doubt an improvement upon its predecessor. But Birabāhu, the hero, is found wanting in that intensity of actions and in those suggestive postures of life which make for a real unostentatious hero. He seems to excel more in words than in deed, more in high-wrought visions and adventures of a romance than in those of the actual life.

The fundamental conception of Hemchandra, if



represented as much in the life of nations as in the heart of individuals. For him there is no world apart from the real, and any disorder in the government of the real will affect the moral or the spiritual. Bira-bahu lived in the real, and he was anxious to fulfil heroically his obligations to the world of fact at the cost of his own life. India, as she then was, supplied him with inspiration for fighting, so that the

দিকদশবাসী                      মানবমণ্ডলী  
 আনি সপ্তসিন্ধুজল,  
 করি অভিষেক                      বলে উচ্চনাদ  
 জাগ্রত আর্ধ্যসঙল ।  
 পশ্চিমে উত্তরে                      হয় ঘোর ধ্বনি  
 আনন্দ সঙ্গীত গায়,  
 উঠে সিন্ধুবারি                      ভারত প্রকাশলি  
 আবার গর্জিয়া ধায় ;  
 উঠে হিমালয়                      পুনঃ শূন্য ভেদি  
 পূর্বের বিক্রম ধরি  
 ছুটে পুনরায়                      জাহ্নবী যমুনা  
 গভীর সলিলে ভরি  
 আনন্দে আবার                      ভারত সম্ভার  
 বীণা ধরে করতলে,  
 আবার আনন্দে                      বাজারে দুন্দুভি  
 বহুধরা মাঝে চলে ।                      আশা-কানন, ৪র্থ কল্পনা ।

Tr. Beholding I found the East radiant with golden light which flooded the whole sphere of India. It seemed Mother India once more sat upon her throne, her face beaming with a fresh smile of primitive vigour. Around her thronged the new race of the Aryans with sceptre and crown in hands, who brushed off the stain of her old infamy and decked her with ornaments over again. Messengers, loud in their declamations and having a strange glow in their countenance were busily hurrying about, with new colours unfurled in the sky. From all quarters of the globe men were pouring in, and were anointing her with waters of the seven seas, while bidding "cheers" to the awakened race of the Aryans. Towards the west and the north a deafening chorus of jubilation was heard at which the Ocean rose, and swept past washing the shores of India. The Himalayas assumed all its ancient vigour, and rose again when the Ganges and the Jumna in the depths of their waters began to flow onwards. In joy, once more the sons of India played on their lyre, and in joy, again, they began to tread the earth with the roar of trumpets.

motive-force is a conviction in the poet's mind—and it was not altogether imaginary—of a Renaissance in the deeper life of India.<sup>1</sup>

Hemchandra was, to all intents and purposes, a teacher ; and here as elsewhere, he could not, considering the circumstances of the age, dissociate the didactic element from his poetry which as poetry was less living to him, and therefore even less so to his readers now. At that stage of our history when so much was hanging in the balance, he thought that we, as a community of thinking men, must pause to consider whether we might not rightly draw inspiration from our great men of the past. To add to that glorious heritage the best of what had been said and thought in the West was the work of Hemchandra, and he has done for us what Matthew Arnold did for "the Philistines" of his England. His was an exquisite balance between two opposed extremes ; he was in love with life because he found it solid<sup>2</sup>, and he was an idealist because he saw events as enveloped by *Māyā* the rending of which, in course of time, will disclose the ultimate Reality behind the veil. The memory of an unforgettable past often vivified by legendary or mythological associations, is one half of his being ; the other and a superior half is of the soul of a

1.
 

পুনশ্চ হিন্দুর রাজ্য স্থাপন করিব ।  
 পুনর্বার অলঙ্কারে তোমারে ভূষিব ॥  
 পুনঃ নির্মাইব পুরী যত হৈল গত ।  
 গঙ্গা যমুনার তীরে ছিল যত যত ॥  
 বিজয়-দ্রুদ্ভি পুনঃ হরিষে বাজাব ।  
 ভারত জাগিল বলি ভুতলে জানাব ॥

Tr. Once more shall I found the Hindu Empire and shall I deck thee with ornaments. Again shall I restore all old cities that stood on the banks of the Ganges. Again shall I beat in joy the trumpet of victory and declare before the world that India is up.

*Loc. Cit., Bīrabāhu Kāvya.*

2. Vide "Jiban-Saṅgit" which is an adaptation of Longfellow's "Psalm of Life." cf. "ইন্দ্রাণ্যে স্বরশতীপূজা ।"

spiritual observer warring in the impressions and sensuous facts of existence, though he knew full well that he stood on the quicksands of Hope.

*Āśā-Kānan* or the "Wilderness of Hope" is an expression of this latter mood, "intended" as the

*Āśā-Kānan.* poet himself says, "to depict in plain colours the natural feelings and

emotions of the human mind." It has been called an allegory. But the conventional cloak of art is too thin to cover the skeleton of the picture. There is no shadowy outline, no hidden thought that can make any meaning dubious or hesitating. The colours are as plain as the facts they paint. It is a comprehensive but ultimately a sad picture of the hurry of modern life, and sad it was bound to be for him who became latterly so monistic in his religious tendencies, and to whom, as to all Renaissance poets, life and history combined to have a special significance.

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## CHAPTER VII

### HEMCHANDRA'S LATER POEMS

#### I

SO far we have seen the moral element dominating Hemchandra's imitative verses. The new world of his people interests him, and he thinks seriously of the problems of the new age. A glorious past, he holds, must lead to a glorious future if only we moved with the moving world. But in the maturer productions, the realistic temper gradually merges into the idealistic, the natural into the supernatural, the moral into the metaphysical.

Hemchandra's  
changed outlook in  
later works.

The revival of our past culture, therefore, had a real meaning to Hemchandra for his later work. But at the same time he welcomed the healthy aspects of foreign culture for his nation. The vein of a satiric disapproval of contemporary fashions<sup>1</sup> imported from outside went *pari passu* with his reproductive instinct for his patriotic poems. He regarded his people as a nation of peculiarly rich spirituality selected by God to proclaim to the world the highest form of Faith, as the Hebrews had been chosen to declare the highest form of Law. With his wide cultural sympathies he combined a taste and reverence for Aryan culture, and on these inborn elements, again, he brought to bear the practical enthusiasm of an Englishman which, without being wild or parochial, fortunately became a strong yet graceful force in his poetry. And while yielding to none in his reverence for India's own greatness he recognised, as most of his contemporaries

His reverence for  
Western culture.

1. See “দেশলাইয়ের স্তব” (Hymn to Match Box) ; ( বাজিমাৎ ) etc.

had done, the necessity of a cultural co-operation<sup>1</sup> with the West.

Conservative as much in his habits as he was classical in his poetry, he was yet open to influences from without. To give and to take, to build up a free commerce in thought, to know the best of what has been said and thought in the world—this is the happiest phase of Hemchandra's cultural synthesis which made of the poet a prophet of his India of to-morrow.

With all his Western predilections it cannot, however, be gainsaid that Hemchandra was primarily an Indian, a full-blooded "Aryan" whose natural affinity was with the soul of ancient India. Of all our poets he drew most from the West but was least inclined to pass anything into our literature before he had consecrated it with a national or individual stamp. There can be no denying the fact that nationalism as

1.

জেনো সত্য জেনো কথা

ইংরাজ-শিক্ষিত প্রথা

ভারত উদ্ধার পথ

তাজ অস্ত্র মনোরথ

ভুলে যাও আগেকার পুরাণ কথন

\* \* \* \*

হে ভারতব্যাপী গিরি, রেখে রে স্মরণ।

ভবিষ্যৎ পারাবার

পার হতে অন্য আর

ভারতে নাহি ভেলা

ভারত-জীবন-খেলা

একত্র ওদেরি সঙ্গে—উদ্ধার, পতন।—“বিশ্ব্যগিরি”, কবিতাবলী।

Tr :—Know it as a gospel truth that the enlightened policy of the English nation is the *sine qua non* to the emancipation of India. Forget the sayings of the Purāṇas you had in the past.

\* \* \* \*

Oh the mighty mountain that holds India within its bosom, remember that for the future of India there is no other course left open to the destiny of her life. With them (the English nation) she must rise or fall.—“The Vindya Hills”—*A collection of poems.*

a factor in our modern politics is chiefly due to the influence of English education, and the novelty of the theme became a craze with many poets beginning with Rangalāl Banerjea. What Tennyson felt for England, Burns for Scotland, Dante for Florence, the German Romanticists after Jena (1806) for Germany, Hemchandra felt for India. Scott is clearly the inspiration of his poem "Janma-bhumi"<sup>1</sup>. And Byron's "Thoughts on Greece" in *Childe Harold* appears to have inspired his legendary poem "Manikarnikā," though the latter is mainly philosophical in spirit. "Indrer Sudā Pān<sup>2</sup>," has been pronounced to be an adaptation from Dryden's "Alexander's Feast." Alfred Austin's "The English Maid" will irresistibly suggest itself to one who reads Hemchandra's "Bangakusum". The ring of James Thomson's "Rule Britannia"<sup>3</sup> not only calls up the picture of the present decadence but also that of the ancient glories of India, as in "Bhārat-Bilāp". The clarion-call of the poet to his people in such pieces as "Bhārat-Bhiksā" (1875), "Bhārat-Sāṅgīt", is reminiscent of the spirited poetical apotheosis by Campbell of past English heroes.

Hemchandra's nationalism had, of course, a sort of

1. কে আছে এমন মানব-সমাজে,  
হৃদি-তন্ত্রী বার আনন্দে না বাজে,  
বহুদিন পরে হেরি স্বদেশ।  
না বলে উল্লাসে প্রফুল্ল অন্তরে  
প্রেমভক্তিমোহে অনুরাগ ভরে,  
এই জন্মভূমি আমার দেশ ॥ জন্মভূমি, also see

স্বতন্ত্রসংস্কার, ১৪ সর্গ।

Tr :—Who is there among men whose heart does not leap in joy when he returns to his native land after a long time, and with a heart brimful of love, reverence, joy and ravishment, does not say that this is my native land? cf. Scott's "My native land".

2. "His (Hemchandra's) *Indra's Nectar Feast* is a spirited imitation of Dryden's *Alexander's Feast*"—Baṅkimchandra Chatterjee, "Calcutta Review" No. 104.

3. The first few lines of D. L. Roy's "যেদিন হুনীল জলধি হইতে etc." read as a translation of the first stanza of this poem,



Tennysonian conservatism about it, not because it was as much insular in its outlook, but because it arose out of a fervent desire to see his poor country restored to her former greatness; and what, therefore, had the ultimate effect of affecting adversely the vital interests of India, socially or spiritually, came in for his gentle satire, if not severe denunciation. The question of the emancipation of women which then agitated England was not without its effect here as well. Hemchandra, among other leaders in Bengal, took the cause in right earnest. He rejoiced where evidence<sup>1</sup> of real advance in it was found, and he reproved, like Goldsmith's Village Preacher, where abuses had still persisted in the society. "Bengali ladies" is an illustration in point. Over the hard lot of our women-folk<sup>2</sup> and of the widows<sup>3</sup> in particular he shed tears in the noble company of Pandit Ísvar-chandra Vidyāsāgar<sup>4</sup>. It is interesting to observe here that he probed every defect in our national character from a Western view-point which he thought to be a necessary corrective, as in literature he found it a great complement.

The modern reader may justly regard with but languid interest these well-meant patriotic verses of the preceding era which have now been superseded by many more beautiful poems. We can certainly offer no artistic ground for reviving these half-forgotten national poems any more than we can ask an adult in poetry to go back to the lisping lessons of his childhood. Nevertheless, they might be cited as literary

1. "বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ে রমণীর উপাধিশ্রাণ্তি উপলক্ষে" ।

Tr :—On the occasion of a Convocation of the Calcutta University when a diploma was conferred on a lady-graduate.

2. "Bhārat-Kamini"—A collection of poems.

3. "Bīdhā-rāmāñi"—A collection of poems.

4. "Kulīnmahilābilāp."

milestones on the progressive road of Indian nationalism. They may be, and are a specimen of "kettledrum" poetry whose pleasing swing and moral urge have been irrevocably lost upon us. We have now almost consigned the claptrap of these verses to oblivion as they lack the eternal elements of poetry, that transcend the limits of time and space. But a serious student of the poet cannot, of course, dismiss in a cavalier fashion these earnest, if imitative, earlier offshoots of Bengali patriotic poetry, the spirit of which also runs through the poet's later work.

## II

An intolerant attitude towards foreign control, a satiric ridicule of the slavish mimicry of Westernism, and a sincere regret for our acquiescence in meaningless superstitions and outworn social creeds—these, therefore, constitute the rough exterior of our poet. The inner man is a grave moralist, a metaphysician who rediscovered the Paurānic Hindu legends under the urge of foreign ideals. This was, indeed, the very mood of the Renaissance, though in him the genial poetic heat which could fuse together the pagan and the Christian systems was not fully stirred to work for his poetry. *Chhāyāmayī* is an illustration of this trend, the declared prototype being Dante's *Divina Commedia*<sup>1</sup>. It presents a death's-head philosophy just when the dawn of materialism was fast breaking upon India. But it is also a testimony to that speculative age which was probing the conditions of life beyond death. The poet here is not indifferent to the sources and materials of his poem. The theme has been arranged to correspond to the divisions and

1. That *Chhāyāmayī* is a 'faint echo' of the *Divina Commedia* is expressed by the poet himself who translated Spenser's Couplet to Dante :

I follow here the footing of thy feete

That with thy meaning so I may there rather meete.

Elsewhere he writes, 'In great many cases I have borrowed the matter and manner of Dante.'—*Hemchandra* by Manmathanāth Ghose.

contents of the "Inferno" in the *Divina Commedia*. The various types of sinners, Indian and Western, doomed to suffer in distinct spheres, the river "Baitarani" and the demoniac ferryman, the Indian counterparts of the Acheron and Charon, the very "style" of the Italian epic have been carefully adopted. The travelling soul of the *Divina Commedia* comes first to the lunar sphere which corresponds to our earthly habitation of fallen christian monks, and it is here that the bereaved father comes in *Chhāyāmayī* :—

Don't forget, oh mortal, that this is that planet which is known on earth as "Aswini" and which, looking like the earth, is a hard, nebulous sphere.<sup>1</sup>

Hemchandra's Inferno is the home of Nero and Sirajudowlā, Cleopetra, Vidyā, Tārā—all sinners Hindu, Mahomedan and Christian. But it is the Paurānic Hell which does not prescribe eternal damnation because that is foreign to Indian thought.

Sin and even repentance have their end ; there is, of course, suffering hereafter, but salvation in the long run.

\* \* \* \*

The whole race of man is bound to each other on earth ; they rise and fall together.<sup>2</sup>

Descriptions<sup>3</sup> are at times vivid, though the whole effect does not strike an imaginative terror for the consequences of sin. There is a cinema-like succession of pictures

Criticism of  
*Chhāyāmayī*.

- |   |                     |
|---|---------------------|
| 1. পৃথিবীর অমুরাপ,                        | দৃঢ় কুহেলিকা স্তূপ |
| অশ্বিনী নক্ষত্র নামে,                     | ব্যক্ত বাহা ধরাধামে |
| এই লোক সে নক্ষত্র, ভুলিওনা জীবি !         |                     |
| (St. 8, 3rd Section, <i>Chhāyāmayī</i> ). |                     |

- |                                   |                  |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|
| 2. দুষ্কৃতির আছে ক্ষয়            | সন্তাপ অনন্ত নয় |
| পরকালে আছে ভোগ, মুক্তি আছে পুনঃ । |                  |
| * * *                             |                  |
| সমগ্র নরের জাতি                   | ধরাতে একত্র সাগী |
| একত্র উদয় গত একত্র পতন ।         |                  |

(St. 38, Section 2, *Ibid.*)

3. e. g. the prologue ; 5th Section, 52-58.

which are apt to pass off as soon as they come. There is an evident fluidity and simplicity in the narrative. But even in such a mature work the poet tends to destroy his habitual metrical swing by careless and slipshod rhymings, instances of which lie scattered throughout his other poetical works. In short, he borrows the manner, the machinery, and sometimes the matter of Dante. But what he lacks is his master's power of lending an artistic, and therefore personal unity to the whole, and his (Dante's) gift of phrasing born of an intensity of vision or feeling.

### III

The expression of the union of the moral and metaphysical in human terms is the central conception of *Britra-Samhāra*,<sup>1</sup> a tragic epic which, though chronologically earlier, is yet artistically better than *Chhāyāmāyī*. It depicts the war between the Devas and Asuras, the Paurāṇic counterpart of the rise of the Titans against the Olympian Jove. Indra represents the moral endeavour the fruition of which is to be seen in the revelation of Fate. Years of contemplation brought to him that philosophic mind which, at the instance of Śiva, or the eternal good of the universe, succeeded in working out the ruin of Britra. Though morally fast degenerating since, Britra had once earned the position of Indra by his austere personal exertion. But all this wisdom and intimations of a higher intelligence to Indra would have been futile unless they were supplemented by the absolute self-immolation of the saint Dadhichi who is proverbially regarded as the type of selfless love and disinterested action. How, then, a moral expansion has been reinforced by the elemental energies of nature, how the superstitious elements have been

1. "The story is properly chosen from Hindu mythology, but the description, the ideas are, as the author admits in the preface, mostly English."—S. C. Dutt, "Calcutta Review", No. 122.

interpreted by a deeper inner life,<sup>1</sup> how the supernatural is to be read as a magical expression<sup>2</sup> of some divine principle, are matters which only a detailed study of the epic can show.

Hemchandra's literary debt to the West is apparent even in this work as well. The very opening canto of the epic is an example of Miltonic massiveness though the character of the fallen gods (1st Canto) seems to have been conceived more nearly from the standpoint of Keats's *Hyperion*. Theological profundities (13th canto), orthodox religious propensities expressed, for example, in his predilection for pilgrimage to Benares and other holy places in India, philosophical inclinations, unscientific cosmogony (21st Canto) are only the echoes of *Paradise Lost*. Allegory apart, it might perhaps appear as going too far to assert that our poet seeks to interpret, in a more sensational way, the fall of Britra as a 'justification of the ways of God to man.' What is, however, certain is that the entire action of *Britra-Samhāra* has been influenced by the largeness, the exalted dignity, the solemnity, and also by the aloofness which are particularly associated with *Paradise Lost*.

Allegorically, the epic may be viewed as having celebrated the triumph of Science over everything that remains unscientific or unsystematized in the old world. From the standpoint of modern philosophy it tends to favour contemplative insight superseding an undisciplined will which is too narrow to take account of forces other than itself. In theology, again, it accepts the revival of Vedantic monism against the deistic theism of the past, and the efficacy of prayers as a fruitful panacea for the ills of life is once more justified. In Bengali poetry the swan-song of

Other probable  
implications.

1. Last lines, 11th Canto, Britra's speech, 12th Canto.
2. Chapalā's Enchantment-garden—5th Canto.

classicism dies down to the scale of a feeble romantic note which shows that the wind was soon to take a completely different course. The scene of Viśwakarmā's arsenal which has been so powerfully described might be as old as our mythologies, but the idea of displaying it before our eyes with its cyclops and tongues of fire, while horrible instruments are being forged in this realm of the sleeping Furies, is a legitimate scientific issue of the nineteenth century.

So far as regards the subject-matter of the epic and all its varried implications which have ample bearing on other shorter pieces. We shall now consider the poet's art of character-painting. character-painting.

We have already hinted at the defective characterization in the epic, and in that, perhaps, lies its failure as a work of art. Almost all the characters, we find, appear as so many high-drawn figures charged, as it were, with an artificial heat of false impulse. The truth is that the whole thing has been trimmed by the exigencies of an overworked heroism. The dramatic detachment of the poet's personality carries with it no dramatic variety of natural life; and consequently no artistic intensity of passion and warmth which could make the characters live in the epic. They speak more for effect than for their own passions; they work for and under a single regulated impulse. In his earnestness the poet seems to forget that heroism without the full play of humanity is abstract even as mere humanity without heroism is nothing but abject. More 'life' would have made the characters perfect, and more use of psychology would have brought out their abiding artistic impressiveness.

The filial affection of Britra, for example, has been drowned in the din of the war and in the display

of his agitated heroism<sup>1</sup>. Oindrila hardly shows any evolution in her character. Unwomanly woman-characters. The real note of her character is pride and jealousy which not even the motherly or womanly instinct could subdue by an iota<sup>2</sup>. Unlike Lady Macbeth she betrays no moral reaction against her persistent evil nature. Disillusionment and despair never prey upon her (though there were occasions for such) as they did on her English prototype, Lady Macbeth. The last-moment lunacy which has been thrust upon Oindrila's head with the fall of the curtain, and which now lends her a presence as wide as the universe, once more points to the unreality of her character. Philosophy does not forsake an otherwise beautiful character like Śachi even while she was held a captive in the very place where she was once a queen, and even while her fate was still hanging in the balance (18th Canto). Wars and rumours of wars are abhorrent to Indubālā. She could, of course, be a good Hindu wife for a Bengali household which realises itself, not in a whirlwind of ambitious activities, but in the quiet backwaters of life. Her devotion to Śachi betrays her silent revolt against a rotten state of things to the continuance of which she could not be a consenting party. The naive goodness of Indubālā as an attendant of Śachi might be desired, but her rôle as a mourning wife ought to have been more prominent for the artistic effect of the tragedy.

The balance of dominant impression which such a tragedy is apt to leave behind turns, therefore, towards the side of abstraction. It has not the profound humanity of its great predecessor *Meghnād-badh* which could excite sympathy even for a sinner. Almost an equal number of catastrophes also occurs in the

Abstract character  
of the epic.

1. See 17th Canto, the parting of Britra and Rudrapida on the eve of the war. cf. *Meghnādbadh*, Canto 1.

2. See 17th Canto, *Britra-Samihāra*, cf. Canto 5, *Meghnādbadh*.

present epic but without having the effect of that deep distress which is calculated to humanise the soul of the reader by an evocation of tragic pity and fear. We can admire a poet who lifts our imagination for a time into the arid realm of imaginary perfection. We are certainly grateful to Hemchandra for metaphysical flights, for having pictured Hindu mythology in the light of Indian philosophy, and for having touched them to a finer issue by a suggestion of the modern spirit. But poetry of any form must touch the ground under our feet, the ground of smiles and tears, of joys and sorrows which, while they mystify, yet hand down to us a residuum of love for the life of flesh and blood on earth.

#### IV

In the poet's mental development we have so far marked three stages, the national, the moral, and the metaphysical. The next stage is that of philosophical mysticism. In *Daśamahāvidyā* (1882) which is the last of Hemchandra's longer pieces, he seems to put forward a plea for a higher wisdom as essential to the proper realisation of the infinite power of Śakti that inheres in the universe. To the pragmatist mind of Nārada it appeared to be a puzzle because of the separatist tendencies of his knowledge. Matter minus energy is nothing, and matter plus energy is everything that makes the universe. This is to the poet the basic principle of creation the cosmic evolution of which has been definitely justified by History and Science. The ten images of the Deity (power, as translated by Sir J. Woodroffe)<sup>1</sup> taken together, may be represented as summing up the whole history of human thought-movement. From the wild state of nature in which man was ordinarily to fly at each other's throat for preserving the self, and in which everything good

Philosophical mysticism of *Daśamahāvidyā*.

1. See Sir J. Woodroffe's letter on this Poem,

(Appendix *Hemchandra*, by Mr. Manmathanāth Ghose).



(Śiva) was trampled under foot we come, through a gradual process of elimination of animality, to an avowedly rational basis of things. Babu Pāñchcowrie Banerjee regards it as something more than merely evolutionary. He takes it at least as an interpretation, similar in character to that of Lessing's Laocoon, of the perfect woman in the life of the Race. If, as Mrs. Underhill urges, the perfection of man is woman, the picture represented here is conceivably the grandest one of Tāntric idealism, and the introduction, at the instance of Babu Bhudebchandra Mukherjee, of the ideal pair<sup>1</sup> somewhat enhances the artistic beauty of the poem which proclaims the union of Hope, Power and Love, the three fundamentals of the Promethean era.

This is admittedly the poet's best performance, and here quite appropriately he makes use of Nārada's lyre to sing out his message to the world :—

This is, after all, not an evil world, and even all the ills which flesh is heir to, will pass into nothingness through the propitiation of the triple-powered Deity. Take it as true and sing it in joy. Keep your mind on the path of rectitude and on that power that knows no beginning. Let the word "salvation" be inscribed on your breast ; let your desires, oh living beings, be fulfilled, and the whole world be saved—such is the declaration of Ś'iva. To that end you must guide yourself, and then life would cease

1. Notice Tennyson's influence on the following lines in

“সতীশ্চ কৈলাস” of দশমহাবিজ্ঞা,

ধ্যানমগ্ন ভোলানাথ

স্বপ্নে কভু তুলি হাত

সতীরে করেন অশ্রুশয্যা । etc.

cf. Tears of the widower, when he sees

A late-lost form that sleep reveals etc.

(See—*Hemchandra* by Mr. Manmathanāth Ghose).

This clearly illustrates Hemchandra's power of assimilating foreign things. Elsewhere he says :—

“My culture of English language and literature from boyhood has not infrequently led me to adapt English thoughts into my poetry.”

to be fearful to you, oh men, for the mother of the universe is, after all, the mother of us all !<sup>1</sup>

An ineffable mystery of Māyā shrouding all things, a magnetic force attracting the divergent forces towards a central reality, and a hope for man in the ultimate triumph of good—these, according to the poet, are the “saving arms” of the Universe. Through the mythological symbol the beneficent divine purpose has been expressed in a variety of lyrical strains. A new transcendental basis has been given to a decade of old and forgotten deities. The uniqueness of the work lies in the fact that it raises this most popular but least understood Hindu pantheon to the level of the modern philosophy of evolutionary change. The world of nature and of human life working their ways through the process of self-abandonment has been restated in new terms, and this principle of automatic renunciation which more than ever seems to the poet a larger lesson, a more assured gospel than what he has yet felt about his message, brings us into more intimate relation with Hemchandra's own mind than his great epic, *Britra-Samhāra*.

But it is often difficult for us, as it was for Nārada, to follow the vision of the poet's solar systems peopled with their presiding deities. It is difficult to conceive the propriety of the display of tumultuous energies

Philosophical interpretation of the Hindu myth.  
Metaphysical nature of the poem.

1. জগৎ অশুভ নয়,                      কালেতে হইবে লয়  
জীবদ্বৈত সমুদয় ত্রিগুণার ভঞ্জে ।  
এই কথা বুঝে সার                      আনন্দে নিনাদ তার  
সত্যপথে রাখি মন অনাত্মের স্মরণে ॥  
লিখি বুকে মোক্ষ নাম                      পুরা জীব মনস্বাম  
'নিখিল নিস্তার পাবে' শিব কৈল আগনি,  
লক্ষ্য করি তারি পথ                      চল নিত্য মনোরথ  
জীবজন্মে ভয় কিরে ?—জগদম্বা জননী ।

—দশমহাবিদ্যা ।

associated with each system unless it were only meant to strike an impression of terrible supernatural shudder. Again, though it is a lyric in spirit, it hardly dives below the surface of a narrative, and really Hemchandra's lyrics seldom rise above the level of narratives, for they are inspired more by intellect than by a profound lyric emotion. And even if the main trend of his philosophical mysticism brought out in a metrical feat rises clear, one is tempted to feel of such poetry as he himself felt about his Brahmo-loka, 'odourless, lustreless, passionless and immobile'.<sup>1</sup>

Such was Hemchandra, the poet who, with all his faults, is loved still. His poetic instrument is the trumpet, and his usual colour purple, so that he makes a bid either for a fanfare or a magnificent sweep. The man was greater than the poet, the moralist higher than the artist. He will certainly be grudged a high place in the republic of our poetry. But he too had earned his share of glory and literary fame in his own days ; he too had shaken his generation and compelled their homage and admiration. Only the fact remains that much water has run down the Ganges ever since, and the nemesis of neglect has now fallen on his poetry.

Conclusion.

1. নির্বিকার

নির্ভীক, নির্জোতি, আভাহীন, তাপশূন্য, ।—ব্রতসংহার, ২১ সর্গ

## INTERCHAPTER III

LIFE OF NABĪNCHANDRA SEN (1852-1908)

**"I**T is a great merit, I might almost call it a divine gift, when any poet is seen to retain throughout life traces of his youthful impressions and feelings." This is what Keble said in his *Dedication of Lectures on Poetry*, and this is largely true of Nabīnchandra who is popularly known as the Byron of Bengal.

Nabīnchandra was born 1852 in the district of Chittagong. His native village, Noāpārā-Gujarā, where he spent his early life, glimmers like an island set in a silver sea, and surrounded by never-ending verdant ranges of hills. These natural scenes were, indeed, the meet nurse for a poetic child, and gave to his poetry the very aspect of the earth and sky and temperature of the weather of his native land. Legends about the poet have it that he was often seen in his boyhood perched upon the tree-top playing upon his flute transfiguring, unconsciously in his own person, the romance of his great *Avatār* whom he was destined to reconstruct in his trilogy.

A mischievous boy at school the young poet earned the rare distinction of 'wicked the great', and there were few associates on whom his puckish spirit did not play some practical jokes ; so that his success in the examinations seemed little short of miracles to his class-fellows. In

1868 he graduated from the General Assembly at Calcutta. But the death of his father one year ago threw him entirely upon his own resources in the struggle for existence. Nevertheless the young poet, nothing daunted by poverty, tried to shift for himself. To create a chance of preferment he courted the patronage of Pt. Išvarchandra Vidyāsāgar, whose hand was constantly stretched out to relieve an honest man in distress. The great philanthropist, as was his wont, first tried his bold candidate with an angry growl. The young poet, in disappointment, was about to leave the place, it is said, with an improvised couplet which moved his benefactor to the personal influence he wanted for his job. He was then nominated to appear in the Public Service Examination of the Province, on the results of which he was appointed Deputy Magistrate. In dedicating his *Palāśir Yuddha* he found an opportunity of offering his acknowledgments in feeling terms at the feet of his great patron.

The romance of Nabinchandra's marriage was a great sensation of the day. It is a love-episode, but it was love given

His marriage.

unsought to one whom he had never seen before he fell in love. Among a thousand anecdotes recorded in his fascinating 'Autobiography', the chapter on his marriage forms a delightful confession of amour charged with the aroma of vainsnavic love of which he was to be a brilliant exponent in Bengali poetry.

Nabinchandra started his career as a poet with the publication of *Avakāśaranjinī*. The book shows all the imperfections of youthful composition, and the title is evidently an adaptation from Byron's *Hours of Idleness*. But the rush and easy grace of the poetic diction was promising of better works in maturer years :

Palāśir Yuddha—1875

Raṅgamati—1880

Raivataka—1886

Amitāva—1895

Bhānumati—1895

Kuruksetra—1896

Pravāsa—1896

Christ—

Amritāva.

The Gītā was the book of his faith. To Nabinchandra it was the Word of God, and so he made of it what Noah made of his ark in the Deluge. Hence it was that he had wished the Gītā to be placed on his breast when he would be dead, the cold brow to be painted with

Influence of the Gītā in his life and poetry.

sandal paste, and the dead body to be clothed in the style of an Indian saint. And equally poetic was the last utterance which he made on the eve of his death. To the apprehensive crowd of visitors who hung about in awful silence on the fateful day he exclaimed, "Āj Bijaya" (to-day is the day of my immersion !). The sentiment expresses, indeed, the spirit of an intense and vivid personality to whom the slow arrival of bodily death signified nothing but the realisation of the great ideal of human love he had worshipped all his life. If Goethe had longed for 'more light' and Keats for greater 'Beauty', the Indian poet proclaimed with satisfaction the Nirvana of his bodily existence. Nabinchandra died a poet indeed, and his last remains, according to his last wishes, were burnt in a place which breathes the spirit of 'the poetry of earth that is never dead.'

## CHAPTER VIII

NABĪNCHANDRA SEN,

OR

THE NEW SPIRIT OF THE EMOTIONAL SYNTHESIS  
IN BENGALI POETRY

### I

**I**N the display of a free-hearted heroic energy, as we have seen, Madhusūdan was inspired by the Hellenic ; in his moral earnestness Hemchandra was approaching the Hebraic ; and in the passionate consciousness of a socio-political ideal illumined by a native spiritual inspiration Nabinchandra was Romantic, though essentially, more of a vaiṣṇava than a rebel of the Byronic type. The first appears to have a touch of the revelry of a śākta behind the titanic force of his tragic conception ; the second in his maturity habitually lived on the serene and dignified altitude of a śaiva with his vision towards the transcendental Reality, and the last soared with the thrilling ecstasy of a vaiṣṇava in his attempt to see everything in the unerring light of his love. And judged again by the cultural psychology of the race, they may be said to represent, in a new literary spirit and perspective, the three underlying forces of Bengali literature, *Tantra*, *Nyāya* and *Bhāgavata*, that is to say, life, light and love ; and these are the forces that received a new significance under the regime of Western culture.

Yet these broad rambling strands of foreign thought, materially so important for our purposes, have not too deeply affected the real distinction between the literary ideals of East and West. Between Arts and Religion the West has always observed a gulf which the East, except in our

Distinguishing  
features of the three  
poets.

Synthesis of Art  
and Religion in the  
East.

modern realistic literature, has so happily obliterated. Religion and Life are kept apart in the West, and the possibility of a direct knowledge regarding our inner nature is consequently withheld from man. Religion generally had enjoyed no privilege of seeing through life till in the nineteenth century a psycho-physical synthesis of thought brought them nearer to a common source of the ultimate mysteries of existence.

The dominant tendency of the Indian mind is, however, towards self-realisation which is as intense in its highest pitches as it is adaptable to changing circumstances. The crude impact of European life and thought could not, therefore, shake this impulse to its depths, nor could, except for a very short period, thoroughly change its outlook on life and society. Her past spirituality had helped her in the crisis, and, if it suffered a temporary depression, it left her the legacy of a great critical and intellectual wealth as recompense. India became spiritually sub-conscious and intellectually conscious.

The test of this sub-consciousness was seen, as we have noticed, in the simultaneous rise in Bengal of a crop of religious and social reformers towards the middle of the last century as a necessary reaction against the heavy onrush of Westernism. And all of them, it is significant to note, started from a spiritual association or with a religious motive and form. Around this reconstruction of ideas and of society there grew up a literature in which either the glory and infallibility of Hinduism as a religion was upheld, or a new eclectic point of view was struck as it was in Brāhmoism. The latter, however, naturally became the rallying-point of the *élite* in Bengal, as it offered a fresh and intelligent restatement of the Vedānta system with a suitable modicum of Christian forms and spirit.

Thus in the rise of neo-Hinduism in Bengal this new liberalism had had an outlet  
 Nabinchandra as an exponent of neo-Hinduism. which found its great neo-vaishnava poet in Nabinchandra Sen. With all its professedly Bengali tone, however, Nabinchandra's vaiṣṇavism, in some of its broad features, is not far from the main currents of European thought after the French Revolution.

Apologists of the poet, sometimes under a false notion of patriotism, trace everything in him to the oriental source, and nothing, except a superficial mastery of Byron, to the credit of the West. To any particular English poet or thinker, it may be conceded, he may not be largely indebted for his ideas and ideals. Nor are such isolated instances at all necessary for the critic, whose business is to show that our poet combined with the spiritual culture of India the most familiar aspects of European thought in the nineteenth century to be particularly noticed in the English Romantic poets. As a poet of the paurāṇic Renaissance<sup>1</sup>, Nabinchandra undoubtedly borrows his poetic materials from purely oriental sources. Vaiṣṇava monism and justification of faith, the gospel of work and prayer, Progress and Order, Free will and Fate, spiritual glorification of man, Avatārisim, Hindu nationalism, and even the theory of cosmic evolution—things that agitated the great Brāhmin theologian Bankimchandra Chatterjee—these need not be suspected of having had any exclusively foreign origin, though their revival was presumably due to a foreign impetus. The emotion struck out of these materials may also be generally taken to have a vaiṣṇavic note about it. But the breadth of the conception, or the revival, as we argue, of the idea of setting up one vast Mahābhārata where man remains 'sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed, equal, unclassed, tribeless', a unit of the nation built on the spiritual heritage of the past,

1. Vide *Introductory*.



certainly presupposes a delicate culture and a capacious mind humanised by a new sympathy. The poet's vision rose above the exigencies of the nation to comprehend the Duty and Destiny of mankind, and the growth of the collective force conquering and utilizing the forces of nature—the two dominant strands of European thought in the latter part of the last century. For nobody who has not been initiated into the cult of the Romantic revolt of the West will dare explode the time-honoured vedic ritualism of the soil, expose its inherent hollowness, portray so vividly the tyranny<sup>1</sup> that the Aryans used to exercise over the non-Aryans, or set Śrīkṛiṣṇa as a liberator of humanity against Durvāsā, a fact not strictly historical<sup>2</sup>. If there was a revival of the Vaiṣṇava doctrine of the glorification of man, the efficient cause was obviously the literary heritage of the democratic West, as conceived through the French "Illumination" by our people of that age. Further, it is difficult to imagine why the poet should have topsyturvied the entire conception of our social organization for placing one from among the Gopa race above the traditionally superior Brāhmins<sup>3</sup>, saturated with autocratic rule, unless he meant to enlighten our people divided among themselves by the strongest caste system that the world has ever known. It was evidently the triumph of Democracy that led him to uphold the cause of the down-trodden mass of the Nāgavamśa seething with discontent. The progress of

1. 3rd Canto, Arjuna's speech, Basumatī Edition, p. 55.

2. "Now I believe it is not historically true either that Krishna set himself up against Brahmanical authority (there was never a greater champion of it) or that the Brahmins even coalesced with the Non-Aryans, in order to put down the Kshatriyas"—Baṅkimchandra's letter to the poet, January 20, 1883.

3. "But the modern poet is of course welcome to give a new character to Krishna"—Bankimchandra's Remarks on Chap. I. Kṛiṣṇa's hostility towards the Brahmins is, according to Baṅkimchandra, a religion of the Gītā, while it is to Mr. Hirendranāth Dutt, a vaiṣṇava trait. Mr. Dutt has proved ("Sāhitya," Vol. VI) that the hostility is really historical and not imaginary, though it may be said, the dramatic combination of so many characters and such different issues is Nabinchandra's own.

scientific thought can only explain the poet's preference for and defence of the physical force<sup>1</sup> allied with a far-reaching wisdom; and his catholic devotion accounts for his sense of the romantic wonder<sup>2</sup> at the indwelling mysteries of things, his robust optimism about the husbandry of the universe. Without having fed his mind on a liberal culture, again, he could not have visualised such hopes and dreams, such Promethean love and patience, and the message of

“So many worlds, so much to do.  
So little done, such things to be.”

The fact is that the advent of a new civilization had lifted the veil upon the past, and had shown that we would do well to compare<sup>3</sup> notes with the West in striking out a new line of thinking for ourselves. If our people had jettisoned the old iron that was the oriental ballast, our creative geniuses took up the new charts of Western culture by which they sailed so hopefully towards the port of El Dorado. The French Revolution inspired the belief in English writers that the dawn of universal peace was at hand, and that a touch of democracy would make the whole world kin. “A new era seems to open,” says F. S. Marvin, “when men arise who aim at reconciling both ideals, and nations settle down to social reform without breaking with the past. Progress after the Revolution, the work of the nineteenth and later centuries, unites the spirit of Burke and Condorcet in a common purpose.” The first impulse of this foreign influence was one of freedom and freshness of outlook akin

Freedom and freshness of outlook.

1. *Rāvatāka*, Kṛiṣṇa's speech, lines 12-16, 12th Canto.

2. *op. cit.* 7th canto, lines 50-82.

3. 'I am constrained to admit' says Baṅkimchandra in his introduction to the translation of the Gītā, 'that for one who is acquainted with Western literature, Science and Philosophy it is not always possible to walk in the usual grooves of our old culture. I myself could not do that, and I have no sympathy with those who think that what our scholars have said is infallibly true, and that everything in the system of Western thought is quite erroneous.'

to the first-fruits of the Italian Renaissance in Europe. Our old sense of freedom was more or less religious or spiritual, and the definition of nationalism as we have it today, was not implied by the term<sup>1</sup> we had in the past. For we were hardly conscious of the ordinary ingredients in the complex idea of nationality, which mean community of race, of language, of territory, of creed, the possession of a share in a great historical tradition. To us patriotism was not a territorial, but a religious or cultural sentiment which invented a number of sacred spots covering the whole Mother-land.<sup>2</sup> Thus as a distinct objective force permeating and animating our every-day affairs in life it could not be realised so intensely, and therefore, it hardly found its way into our literature before the English era.

Still more pronounced, however, is the influence of this Romantic revolt on the artistic execution of Nabinchandra's poetry. He suffered his passionate imagination to be heated to a higher degree than could often be tempered by the laws of Art. The boldness of his poetic vision outran its expression, the pristine masculinity of his conception chose to wear a cloak that was sometimes too unceremonious or baggy. There was an evident outspokenness which generally fails to awaken that curiosity and æsthetic pleasure that proceed from the epic qualities of proportion and restraint.

This, again, accounts for the artistic failure of his blank verse. He lacks the sense of that Miltonic reserve which is an essential prerequisite to the handling of such a dangerous vehicle, especially, in epics. Even such compelling music and natural melody as he possessed could but ill conceal his want of heroic repose, or the

1. We had the term *Jāti* which only signifies one common origin (B. C. Pal's *Soul of India*).

2. "The Hindu conception of the Mother-land" by Rādhākumud Mukerjee, "Indian Culture," Vol I, No. 4.

paucity of elegance in his search for the *mot juste* and for a delicate shading of phrases. His bold conception carried with it a bolder style which did not hesitate to descend to slangs and risky gestures. In his breathless hurry to be comprehensive he did not pause to concentrate his mastery of many *rasas* to do full justice to all his characters ; and where it pleased his fancy, he devoted pages to a single idea or to a minor action—to be brief, he submitted, like Byron, his whole theme to himself.

## II

In Bengali poetry of the mid-nineteenth century the new note of freedom was first sounded, as we have seen, by Rāṅalāl Banerjea. In Hemchandra, in Bankimchandra, and finally in Nabinchandra's *Avakāś'aranjini*,<sup>1</sup> Nabinchandra this note reappeared with a revived interest in the past as we find in the literatures of England and of Germany of this period. Again, the contagion of German fret and fury associated with Goethe's *Sorrows of Werther* and Schiller's *Robbers* came through Byron to take hold of our poets, as we noticed in the case of Hemchandra Banerjea. Nabinchandra's *Avakāś'aranjini*<sup>1</sup> also shows the same symptoms of a vague yearning or despair, and *wertherism* together with an amatory effusion over an unreal beauty such as we find in Elizabethan songs and lyrics.

The next publication of the poet is *Palāś'ir yuddha*, a metrico-historical romance written in the pictorial-musical style of the Romantic school. The subject is so near to the heart of the nation that it intuitively calls up many 'wise saws and modern instances' regarding the national life of the Bengalee. Here in many places the poet freely draws on Byron's *Childe Harold* and perhaps also on Scott's romances.<sup>2</sup> The

His *Palāś'ir yuddha*  
and *Childe Harold*.

1. cf. Byron's *Hours of idleness*.
2. The introduction of the song-element is a probable imitation of Scott.

third canto of *Palāś'r yuddha* has a striking resemblance to the third canto of the *Childe Harold*, especially to the Waterloo scene of the latter. The background is the same ; the sentiments are essentially similar ; only the intelligent pupil has amplified and given a local colour to his details some of which are nevertheless quite obvious.

Last evening saw these poor fellows full of lusty life, and lost in mirth amid a circle of beauties. The midnight brought them up to an orgy of sensual pleasures. The morning found them marshalled in arms, and the day in battle's mortal array, but alas ! before it was dusk, their eyes were closed in eternal sleep. Rider and horse, friend and foe, the Ksatrias and the Yavanas, all found the one and the same grave.<sup>1</sup>—Tr.

Again, Sirājuddowlā, though a shadowy character in the epic, cannot stand on his own legs. To be a tragic figure he must dream his dreams<sup>2</sup> in the style of his cousin, Shakespeare's Richard III.

Sirājuddowlā and  
Shakespeare's  
Richard III

1. The poet of the plassey sorrows over the dead soldiers :—

কালি নিশাযোগে লয়ে রমণীরতন  
আমোদে ভাসিতেছিল মন কুহুহলে,  
প্রভাতে সন্ধ্যা সাজে সাজিল সকল,  
মধ্যাহ্নে মাতিল দর্পে কালান্তক রণে ;  
না ছুইতে প্রভাকর তুধর-কুন্তল  
সায়াকে শায়িত হল অনন্ত শয়নে ।  
বিপক্ষ, বান্ধব, অথ, অথারোহিগণ,  
একই শয্যা গুণে ক্ষত্রিয় যবন !

—4th Canto

Is it anything beyond a poetic rendering of the following ?

Last noon beheld them full of lusty life,  
Last eve in Beauty's circle proudly gay,  
The midnight brought the signal-sound of strife,  
The morn the marshalling in arms,—the day  
Battle's magnificently stern array !  
The thunder—clouds close o'er it, which when rent  
The earth is cover'd thick with other clay,  
Which her own clay shall cover, heap'd and pent,  
Rider and horse,—friend, foe,—in one red  
burial blent ! *Childe Harold*, Canto III, XXVIII.

Compare also stanzas 1-6, in *Palāś'r yuddha*, Canto III with stanzas XVII, XXII, in *Childe Harold*, Canto III.

2. Sirājuddowlā's dreams (Canto III) read almost as a translation of Richard III's dreams in Act V. iii of that drama.

For our purpose, the third publication, *Raṅgamati*,<sup>1</sup> is important only for the suggestion of the theme which the poet develops in the next three epics, *Raivataḥa*, *Kuruḥsetra*, and *Pravāsa* which will now be considered.

Nabīnchandra's  
trilogy.

### III

Nabīnchandra's trilogy can be represented as a pyramid having three continuous stages of development, and this development, again, is organically connected with that of the protagonist Śrī-Kṛṣṇa.

The problem of  
his epic cycle.

The process is really like the movement of a circle within a circle, and with the whirling of the smaller pivotal circle the bigger one grows and expands, till in the end the two become one, and merge themselves in a yet more comprehensive one. Further, it is a didactic epic cycle, which was the first of its kind in our literature. Fundamentally, the problem is to find out for the degenerate people of India a power and a common solvent which could collect all her divergent political forces, and adjust them to a common end; in other words, to discover the soul of India in order that the orientation of a greater India might be possible. That basis could be supplied by nothing short of a neo-vaiṣṇavaism which, as we have already suggested, was, in certain respects, coloured by the revolutionary ideal of the West; and this neo-Vaiṣṇavism, it will be seen, was drawn chiefly from the Bhagavad Gītā which, as Emerson put it in the same age, is "the voice of an old intelligence, which in another age and another climate had pondered and thus disposed of the same questions which exercise us."<sup>2</sup>

Ostensibly the *motif* was to be political, because

1. Its less beautiful prototype is Hemchandra's *Birabāhu Kāvya*. cf. Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* for the *dénouement* of the love-story of *Rangamati*.

2. Vide "Emerson's debt to the Orient" by A. E. Christy, "Visva-Bhārati Quarterly" January, 1928.

without such a great political dissension as we find in the *Mahābhārata*, no action of national significance could be projected for the epics. The poet harked back to the *Mahābhārata*, and came round to a unity in religion through a *rapprochement* in the political and social life of India divided against itself by numerous castes and creeds. A policy calculated to bring the Aryans and non-Aryans together was, therefore, improvised; some situation had to be created on the common principles of our primary emotions; and a significant departure was necessary for staging the fall of the old tyranny of the Brāhmins and Ksatrias over their neighbouring races. The great author of all these is Śrī-Kṛiṣṇa who was out to ruin the vicious, and protect the virtuous—the supreme mission of his self-expression as *Pūrṇa-Avatār* (or perfect manifestation of the ultimate Reality).

The whole philosophy of Śrī-Kṛiṣṇa as conceived in our vaiṣṇava vedānta, centres on the eternal interaction of *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛiti* through life, light and love. Every system of our philosophy has assumed this duality as its starting-point for a rational solution of the riddle of this universe. But it was left to Vaiṣṇavism to posit to this duality a quality that is absolutely human, and an idealism that is exquisitely realistic. It is possible, according to this system, that *Puruṣa* can realise himself in and through *Prakṛiti*, the object of his thought or knowledge, emotions and volition, to the same degree that *Prakṛiti* can realise herself in and through *Puruṣa* in the same manner. Unless this mutual relationship is recognised and realised, all our spiritual endeavour as *Prakṛiti* would be paralysed, and the Personality of the Absolute or *Brahmā* should remain a blank abstraction. Our vaiṣṇava poet-philosophers not only realised, but lived this principle of relation in an unparalleled manner, and so they found no difficulty

Interaction of *Puruṣa*  
and *Prakṛiti* in  
Vaiṣṇava philosophy.

in accepting Śrī-Kṛṣṇa as God in man or man in God

Herein, therefore, comes the conception of *Bhagabān*, the highest category in the vaiṣṇavic thought, and as will be presently noticed, the highest of all religious ideas. For it brings about a singularly successful compromise between the subject and the object of human thought, a synthesis of the outer cosmic world and the inner spiritual order in man. In *Bhagabān* we find the golden link between *Brahmā* as the cosmic soul, and *Paramātmā* as the over-soul in individual human beings. The act of eternal self-differentiation which is the source and satisfaction of our being, or, in a Hegelian phrase, "the act of the separation of the self from itself to return to itself to be itself" gives us the concept *Bhagabān*; and the joy that this eternal process creates, the life it generates, the light it radiates, the very dreams, experiences, the whole history of our revelation as *Prakṛiti* are the stuff of which *Bhagabān* is made, and of which Śrī-Kṛṣṇa is the living embodiment in our literature. He is the greatest poem of the highest religious idea in humanity.

Viewed from the exclusively human standpoint, again, *Bhagabān* may also appear as what we call *Nārāyana* whereby he realises and reveals himself in and through man.

*Bhagabān* as *Nārāyana*. This revelation, which one of our modern thinkers compares with Joseph Mazzini's Humanity, is a Being, a self-conscious and self-active personality in individual as well as in social life. Apart from his transcendent aspect *Nārāyana* is the indweller in every man perfecting the course of individual human evolution as slowly but surely as he is guiding the destiny of the species. For the individual soul he stands as *Narottama*, or the superman of the *Gītā*, and for regulating the

1. Vide *Śrī-Kṛṣṇa* by Bipinchandra Pāl, P. 55.



mass-energy in the social or universal evolution he appears as an Avatār or God in History. In the great historic drama of the *Mahābhārata* he combines the two ideals. He is at once the protagonist and the *deus ex machina*, or God-outside-the-machine, a great *Karmayogī*, yet completely resigning his ego to a higher, mysterious non-ego which is rolling through all things.

A combination of these aspects in a pre-eminently lyrical mood is the simple framework of a great epic like Nabinchandra's *Raivataḥa*, which supplies the basis of its sequel *Kuruḥsetra* and *Pravāsa*. The beginning of the *Raivataḥa* is significant. It opens in a perfectly romantic strain with a sacred scene of the Aryans worshipping the sun in a chorus of Vedic hymns, but it is scrutinised in the light of modern science, and thereby pressed into the service of the plot starting in a real romantic spirit. Why should the sun, so the poet argues here, have a better claim to our homage than the dust in the field, if both are intrinsically the same? On the same analogy he asks why should a Brāhmin be necessarily held superior to those who are left in obscurity in the lowest stratum of society? Such was the drift of the discussion between Kṛiṣṇa and Arjuna, when the sage Durvāsā, the type of Brāhmanic autocracy, appeared on the scene, but felt insulted because, in the heat of their conversation, the heralds of the new age could take no notice of the blatant sage when he was gratuitously showering his blessings upon them. The situation is thus clear : Durvāsā with all his emphasis on deism and Vedic ceremonials, was fighting against a growing religion in which the dignity<sup>1</sup> of man as man was

1.

মানব ! চেতনায়ুক্ত বিবেকী, স্বাধীন,  
জড় ওই পূৰ্ব্য হতে কত শ্রেষ্ঠতর !  
মানব ! উৎকৃষ্ট সৃষ্ট, যে অনন্ত জানে  
সৃষ্ট ও চালিত এই বিশ্বচরাচরে,  
পড়েছে সে জান-ছায়া হৃদয়ে বাহার ! (continued)

emphasized, and to which the people were drawn by an inward love for romance hanging round the enigmatic personality of Śrī-Kṛṣṇa. This contempt for tradition, whether it followed on the revival of Vaiṣṇavism, or on the main spirit of the Gītā, appears to have been crystallised by the revolutionary ideal of the West. The atmosphere was suffused with particles of native waters ; only a refreshing light—the life-giving light of Shelley and Byron—was necessary to unfold it in all its prismatic hues and splendours.

A reverence for law<sup>1</sup> was bred by Science with its increasing knowledge and invitable spirit of inquiry.

Influences of Science  
and Politics.

The effects of geological and biological discovery shook to its depths the old cosmogony of the Śāstras ; and the general spiritual unrest was reflected remarkably in the poetry of this period. If these were the two ways in which Science had affected, more or less, every channel of intellectual activity, there were other directions in which the triumph of the principle of nationality rendered this age distinctive and memorable. History records that nationalism in Europe reached its climax in the seventies of the last century. "The year 1871 forms, indeed, one of the great water-

ছাড়ি সে অনন্ত জ্ঞান, অনন্ত শক্তি

কেন সে পুজিবে অন্ধ জড় প্রভাকর ?

*Raivataka* (Basumati Ed.) 1st Canto, Kṛṣṇa.

Tr. Man, a conscious, conscientious, free being infinitely superior to the inanimate sun we behold ; man, the lord of the creation, and rich in his possession of a shadow of that infinite wisdom that rules the universe, why should he blindly seek to worship a material body like the sun to the rejection of that fountain of light and knowledge ?

1.

প্রণয় বিপুল হৃদি, জ্ঞানিও নিশ্চয়

ষেচ্ছাচারে নহে বৎস ! চালিত, রক্ষিত

কিবা জন, কিবা জাতি, উভয় সমান

দ্বল জ্বা নিয়মাধীন ।

*op. cit.* 3rd. canto, Vyāsa, p. 58-59.

Tr. Know, my child, that the government of this mighty creation does not stand on an arbitrary will. The nation, as much as the individual, is guided and maintained by the one law of Necessity.

sheds of modern history. In that year two great Powers simultaneously attained the goal of national unity. The Franco-German War (1870-1) put the coping-stone not only upon the work of Bismarck in Germany, but upon that of Mazzini, Cavour, Garibaldi, and Victor Emmanuel in Italy."¹ Indeed, among the old political units in the throes of the actual outburst of national liberation in the last century Greece, Italy, and Germany had agreed to be re-constituted by an intense revolutionary spirit. In each case the force of an ideal past was at work to re-create a better future. For India, the light of an alien culture had brought her to realise that she was lacking in unity in her national life, though her struggle for freedom was more cultural than purely political; and with the progressive Europe she had begun to work out, at first as a sort of imitative gesture, the great problems which the revolutionary age had handed down in the West—self-government, social reform, international relations, and world-control.

An emphasis on the political aspect of Śrī-Kṛiṣṇa's *līlā* was, therefore, too natural with the poet who, if at all, must hold a mirror up to his age. The immediate task which lay before him as it lay before two great statesmen in the nineteenth century in Europe, Cavour in Italy, and Bismarck in Germany, was to build from a set of disconnected and often ill-governed states one strong and well-administered nation. But Śrī-Kṛiṣṇa's mission was far higher. All territorial divisions, according to him, are subversive of religious unity and discipline. Hence his ambition was first imperialistic in the sense that the people who, in spite of the barriers of space, had a fundamental unity of religious thought in them would evolve one universal religion for the whole of India, condescend to worship God under the same roof.

So long as India is divided into independent units, O

1. Sir J. A. R. Marriot, *A History of Europe, 1815-1923*, p. 4.

Pārtha, the divisions of religion will be as sharp as the Aryans will be cut up into many groups.<sup>1</sup>

The political aspect was, as we have said, intimately bound up with the religious or spiritual. Of this revival of Hinduism which was changed to suit the new conditions of life, Śrī-Kṛṣṇa was the soul, Vyāsa the head, and Arjuna the arms in the entire body-politic of the regenerated India. And the inspiration, the philosophy, and the mode of operation point to a universal religion whose centre is everywhere but circumference nowhere.

The instruments of his politico-religious mission,

Behold my presence pervading the entire universe. I am the Life of universe, of the things, animate and inanimate. Birth, Death, and Life with all its endless transformations are my sports. No Brahmā, no Rudra, nothing is except myself, the *Bhagabān*, the one-without-a-second, the prime mover of the entire Existence.<sup>2</sup>

It is the *Viśva-rupa* of the Gītā, the goal of monism, and the scheme of its work through the superman is :—

Let there be one religion, one race, one kingdom, one law ; let the doctrine of universal good be the motto of one and all. Let all actions be selfless, and the ultimate goal be the great, one-without-a-second Brahmā, in order that the

1.                   যতদিন খণ্ডরাজ্য                   রহিবে ভারতে, আৰ্য্য

জাতি খণ্ড খণ্ড পার্থ রহিবে নিশ্চয় ;

রহিবে এ রাজ্যভেদে ধৰ্ম্ম ভেদময় ।

op. cit. 17th Canto. Kṛṣṇa, p. 130.

2.                   বিশ্বপদব্যাপী দেখ মম অধিষ্ঠান !

বিশ্বের জীবন আমি, আমাতে জীবিত

চরাচর, জন্ম, মৃত্যু, স্থিতি-রূপান্তর,

নাহি ব্রহ্মা, নাহি রুদ্র, আমি ক্রীড়াবান্ ;

একমেবাদ্বিতীয়ন্—আমি ভগবান্ ।

*Ibid.* 17th Canto. p. 130, also 12th Canto. p. 109.

foundation of the Mahābhārata, the reign of Religion, may be a settled fact.<sup>1</sup>

Here is also the basis of the theory of incarnation, or more accurately speaking, *Avatārisim*. Because in thus trying to expand himself for the very purpose of self-comprehension Śrī-Kṛṣṇa repeats ideally the whole process of evolution in his own person. He never forsakes his past<sup>2</sup> but carries it forward to the reality of the present only with such variations as the new age might develop for its legitimate fulfilment<sup>3</sup>. He re-enacts the *Adi-līlā* in the *Raivataka*, comprehends himself primarily for his own joy, and thereby sings the triumph of Virtue over Vice for the good of the world. He lives by self-differentiation into mutually opposing forces and by victory over these oppositions. Thus Śrī-Kṛṣṇa as an *Avatār* is, like Hegel's Absolute, most decidedly a man of war who conceives himself in external relationships, presupposes the social life, enters into the conflict, triumphs over the conflict, and so comes nearer than ever to realizing his unity with his deeper self.

#### IV

The social life which Śrī-Kṛṣṇa conceives for himself in the *Raivataka* is, however, composed of characters all of whom, indeed, do not reach the same sustained height of epic excellence. There is at times a sloppy sentimentality, a degenerate effeminacy which, as Sir Brajendranāth Seal rightly

Nabinchandra's  
sensuousness and lack  
of epic discipline.

1. এক ধর্ম, এক জাতি, এক রাজ্য, এক নীতি,  
সকলের এক ভিত্তি সর্বভূতহিত।  
সাধনা নিষ্কাম কর্ম লক্ষ্য সে পরম ব্রহ্ম  
একমেবাদ্বিতীয়ম্! করিব নিশ্চিত  
ওই ধর্মরাজ্য “মহাভারত” স্থাপিত; *Ibid.*

2. Vide 7th Canto, p. 78-85,

3. Vide 12th Canto, p. 107-108, Kṛṣṇa.

points out, ruins the massive grandeur of the epic and its solemn design. The unrestrained sensuous poet of *Avakāsarānjini*, like the young author of *Endymion*, takes in all that comes within the sweep of his exuberant imagination, fancying that every mood of dalliance or erotic outburst is a sure gesture of Vaiṣṇavism. This is, indeed, the danger to which erotic mysticism is so often exposed. Hence behind his seemingly vaiṣṇavic ecstasy of free love there is sometimes a hidden want of spiritual suggestion which reduces particularly the eleventh and eighteenth books of the *Raivataḥa* to a mere play of the flesh. Here at least he lacks that insight of a truly vaiṣṇava poet who, by a master-stroke of art, can show that matter and spirit interpenetrate each other, that the sensuous is a doorway to the supra-sensuous.<sup>1</sup> In other words, a surer hold on his Muse disciplined by Art and consecrated by a higher imaginative idealism would have saved the poet from that lawless abundance and verbiage which characterise all his productions after *Palāśir yuddha*.<sup>2</sup>

It may, however, be contended that all cloud and

1. cf. Rabindranāth's বৈষ্ণব কবিতা

শুধু বৈকুণ্ঠের তরে বৈষ্ণবের গান ?  
 পূর্বরাগ, অনুরাগ, মান অভিমান  
 অভিসার, প্রেমলীলা, বিরহ মিলন  
 বৃন্দাবন গাথা,—এই প্রগয়-স্বপন  
 প্রাণের শব্দরীতে কালিন্দীর কুলে  
 চারি চক্রে চেয়ে দেখা কদম্বের মূলে  
 সরমে সজ্জমে,—একি শুধু দেবতার ?  
 এ সঙ্গীত-রসধারা নহে মিটাবার  
 দীনমর্ত্যবাসী এই নরনারীদের  
 প্রতি রজনীর আর প্রতি দিবসের  
 তপ্ত প্রেমতৃষা ?

2. Bankimchandra rightly held in his *Bibidha Prabandha* that intensity in the poetry of his time suffered owing to the extensiveness of knowledge, and he thereby lent support to the theory that Poetry declines as Science grows.

no sunshine is also not Art ; or as Kant says, man, as placed between the purely sensual (animal) and the purely intellectual (superhuman) creation, alone possesses art, and this latter flourishes only on the borderland of the higher and lower worlds. Such a definition of Art, accurate as far as it goes, cannot however justify a rather categorical opinion that "ten of the twenty books of the *Raivataka*"<sup>1</sup> should be expurgated before the epic can commend itself to any serious critical consideration. These condemned books written undoubtedly in a flippant style, chiefly deal with the love-episodes, or to be more accurate, the *Pūrva-rāga* of Subhadra, Śaila, Jaratkāru, Rukmini and Satyabhāmā—characters whose development and individual importance in the epic cannot be properly appreciated without reference to the *Kuruṣetra* and the *Pravāsa*. With the omission of those books, then, these characters will have to be obelised ; the dramatic value of the epic will suffer, and "the fragment that would remain," as the philosopher himself admits, "would be a colossal wreck of a national epic" ; because Subhadra and Śaila complete the human aspect of Arjuna who is not a mere paste-board hero ; Jaratkāru, frenzied with love for Kṛiṣṇa, renders the machinations of Durvāsā futile, Sulochanā with all her apparent pertness is an excellent example of disinterested love, the very gospel-truth of Śrī-Kṛiṣṇa's teaching ; while Satyabhāmā and Rukhmini are still valuable as a contrast between the material and spiritual. But even all of them are mere shadows, as they really are, in the world of being drawn through their manifold activities by a higher unifying power to perfection in the world of becoming. Dramatically, therefore, these women are as necessary for the plot as they are for the full manifestation of God's *Itā* in the world.

1. "The simple truth is that ten of the twenty books (Books VI, VIII, X, XI, XIII, XV, XVIII, and, we may add, Book V and XX) must be lopped off, if the *Raivataka* is to take a place among the great epics of Bengal"—*New Essays in criticism* by Sir B. N. Seal, pp. 95-96.

Thus the women-characters of the *Raivataḥa* constitute as much the enveloping action of the poem as they make up the foil to the picture of Śrī-Kṛṣṇa. The uniqueness of Nabīnchandra's Śrī-Kṛṣṇa lies in the synthesis of the two conflicting phases of his character, the poetic and the prophetic, the Hellenic and the Hebraic. Obviously the paurāṇic Śrī-Kṛṣṇa and the Śrī-Kṛṣṇa of the *Mahābhārata* go ill together. What is only unepical in the *Raivataḥa* is the cheap dalliance of the women which is, indeed, too sur-realistic to claim the symbolic significance of sensuous Vaiṣṇavism.

## V

Again, the consuming sexual passion of Śaila steadies into a spiritual flame through the process of a hard discipline and penance practised on an image of Arjuna for twelve long years in the forest. Whatever gross or earthy was still left in her was swept away by the tragic self-sacrifice of Abhimanyu which finally shapes her ideal of love. This example she emulates by laying down her life while fighting with the robbers in defence of Subhadra.<sup>1</sup> That hers is a dedicated life is to be seen here as well as in the selfless love she bears towards Abhimanyu. The last scene in the *Pravāsa* is illustrative of this, and it has all the dignity, grandeur, and pathos of fulfilment and enlightenment which is the very essence of tragedy. Similar is the case with Sulochanā whose life was attuned to the love of Abhimanyu and died with the death of the latter. Even Satyabhāmā, the counterpart of Rukminī, changes her rôle, and adjusts herself to the intensity of the issues in the end. It is to be noted here that all the women-characters love at first sight, but all the loves, excepting that of Arjuna and Subhadra, are shown to be apparently crossed by misadventure but crowned with a noble death. They are, we believe,

1. See *Pravāsa* Bk. VII.



the sensuous embodiments of the *Gopī-rasa* of Śrī-Kṛṣṇa, and as characters they are either original<sup>1</sup>, or so much developed out of the pencil-sketches<sup>2</sup> of the *Mahābhārata* as to reflect all the credit of the original on the poet whose worst fault here, as we have just observed, lies in his failure to hit happily on the golden mean between brevity and prolixity.

Among the women-characters, Subhadrā appears, in all probability, the Florence Nightingale<sup>3</sup> at Scutari.

Types of women. Jaratkāru has an echo of Shakespeare's Juliet in her voice. Her love and youth are pledged, almost against herself, to Duryāsā only to feed the ancient grudge of her disappointed brother, and hence her revolt and indignation against the nuptial bond. But she is not as spotless as Juliet or Iphigenia to be sacrificed for a great cause either as an expiation of the past or as a propitiation for the future. In the exuberance of wit and gaiety, in energy of spirit, or in ceaselessly 'speaking mirth', Sulochanā, again, has a prototype in Shakespeare's Beatrice<sup>4</sup>, though the ring of a subdued pathos

1. জরৎকার, শৈলজা, হুলোচনা, ইহার সম্পূর্ণ নূতন সৃষ্টি।

Tr. Jaratkāru, Sailajā, Sulochonā are entirely new creations.

H. N. Dutt ; *Sāhitya* B. S. 1298.

2. ষাঁহার মহাভারত পাঠ করিয়াছেন, তাঁহার বোধ হয় বুঝিয়াছেন যে, উক্ত মহাকাব্যে যে সকল চরিত্রের কেবল নামমাত্র উল্লিখিত আছে, কবি অপূর্ব কৌশলে, বিচিত্র কল্পনাবলে, তাঁহাদের কেমন জীবন্ত করিয়া তুলিয়াছেন।

Tr. Readers of the *Mahabharata* are perhaps aware that characters which are mere names in the great epic have been made by our poet instinct with life by the vigour of his imagination and the exquisite skill of his art.

—*Sāhitya* B. S. 1298, article by H. N. Dutt.

3. বৈদিক যুগের ব্রাহ্মণ ঋষি হইতে আরম্ভ করিয়া পৌরাণিক যুগের জাতীয় সংঘর্ষ, করাসী বিদ্রব, আবটের নেপোলিয়ান বোনাপার্ট, চিন্তাদক্ষ মেরী আন্টনিয়ট, মানব-হিতৈষিনী ফ্লোরেন্স নাইটিংগেল, প্রভৃতি সকলেই এই মহাকাব্যের উপকরণ যোগাইয়াছেন।—বঙ্গবাসী

Tr. The Brahmin-saint of the Vedic era, the national turmoil of the Paurāṇic age, Abbott's Napoleon Bounaparte, the agitated Mary Antoinette, the philanthropist Florence Nightingale, all have contributed to the materials of this great epic,

(Vide. *Bangabānī*, p. 121, by Śaśāṅkamohan Sen.)

4. Shakespeare's *Much ado about nothing*.

and a motherly tone in her heart is all her own. On the whole, we find three types of womanhood represented here—the mother, the maiden and the friend. They are, however, all connected with a bigger issue, and clothed with a highly religious and spiritual significance.

But the transfiguration of Durvāsā in the *Pravāsa* though beautiful in itself, has been rather abrupt, and no psychological development or spiritual crisis has been shown to be at work in his mind so as to justify his sudden change to Kṛiṣṇa-love or at least to his feeling of inadequacy of the vedic deism. The thin external action—the mere fall of a stone on his body, and his intense thirst probably consequent upon it, which has nothing to do with his old religious monomania—cannot reasonably warrant a transformation so vital and comprehensive. The plot is insufficient for the purpose, and the wheel of Nemesis turns on too slender a basis to carry conviction. In the conversion of Vasuki whose mind is already so plastic and whose situation is throughout involved in a tragic complexity there is, however, nothing left to be desired.

## VI

Incidentally, it may be observed here that the trilogy, in some of its broad features, has some striking points of apparent resemblance to Virgil's *Æneid*, though the latter has a manifestly secular interest about it. Both are distinct national anthems embodying the pageants of their respective histories, the delineation of their individual soil. Both are honey-combed with the romantic spirit in their two principal fields of love and adventure. A direct vital human interest is common to both, and they agree to create men and women on the heroic plane embodying the qualities, passions and emotions of

Some external resemblances to the *Æneid*.

actual life. In both of them, again, the figures are connected with larger and sublimer issues, with the laws of nature and the decrees of fate, the workings as it were, of an inscrutable Providence and the profound sense of human destiny as at once moulding the human soul and interpreted by it. Further, both are at one in exalting the new regime, giving shape and colour to their ideals of peace and justice, ordered liberty, and beneficent rule. And, finally, they join hands in lifting themselves into a higher sphere so as to touch the deepest springs of religion and philosophy, opening avenues into the invisible world and lighting up beacon-lights for the future.

In the absence of any external evidence of Virgil's influence, all these points of similarity can only bring

The poet's indebtedness to the Gītā.

The poet's indebtedness to the Gītā.

us to presume that the Latin epic touches, if at all, the outer fringe of the problem which our poet had sought to expound mainly by an emotional restatement of the Gītā. The Gītā, as we know, has sought to harmonise the ways of *Jñāna* (knowledge and intuition) *Bhakti* (loving devotion) and *Karma* (action). This unification is the theme of the whole epic which, really speaking, is the dream of a free man over the Gītā, even as the *Paradise Lost* is the dream of a Puritan fallen asleep over the Bible. Hence the whole philosophy has been succinctly brought out by Vyāsa in the "Fruit of Action"<sup>1</sup>. What is the significance of this evolutionary process?

“Why is the existence of this world or its evolution ? It is his Māyā, the reflection of his own self or his own nature ! This evolution makes for the good of the universe, and Virtue or Vice is measured with reference to the nature of our pursuits or Karma.—Bk. XII, *Pravāsa*. (Tr.)<sup>1</sup>

১. কেন এই বিবর্তন?— কেন এ সংসার?  
 তাঁর মায়া, তাঁর ছায়া, প্রকৃতি তাঁহার।  
 এই বিবর্তন গতি,— জগৎ মঙ্গল,—  
 অমুকূলে প্রতিকূলে কর্ম অমুনার  
 ধর্মার্থ, পাপপণ্য।

Bk. XII, *Pravāsa*.

Here we find a close approximation to the *Vignāna-yoga* of the Gītā. And here also the poet definitely launches upon the true Vaiṣṇavic position as opposed to the Śāṅkara Vedānta's with regard to the reality of both the world-process and the incarnation of the Lord. This world-process, so he adds, is not an illusion, not a shadow-show, but a reality coming from and living in the reality of the process of thought and love in the Being of the Absolute. The goal of the universal, and not of individual, good is the end towards which it is moving in a deathless harmony, and whatever contributes to this harmonious universality is, in its own way, fulfilling its individual destiny<sup>1</sup>. This "doctrine of happiness" has been used to explain the theory of *Karma* and the transmigration of the soul which also subsumes Avatārism or the progressive realisation of the self.

This idea<sup>2</sup>, again, may be traced to the *Karma-Sannyāsa-yoga* or the impulse of selfless activity of God, the principle that is at work behind the great *Kurukṣetra*. The expansion<sup>3</sup> of the individual in time and space on a given basis covers the universal in the eternal, and anything subversive of this process means a setback in that expansion. On this conquest of the individual self depends the privilege and importance of

1. See Bk. XII, *Kurukṣetra*,—"The doctrine of Happiness."

2.                   কর কর্ম, এই গতি কর অনুসার,—

পাবে জন্ম, পাবে লোক, শ্রেষ্ঠ শ্রেষ্ঠতর,

কর কর্ম, এই গতি প্রতিকূলে আর,—

পশুত্ব—জড়ত্ব—পাবে জন্মজন্মান্তর ।

Bk. XII, *Pravāsa*.

Tr. Do your Duty ; follow it, if you will, and you will be carried on to higher people and to higher worlds. Should you follow a contrary course you will come down gradually to the level of beasts and inanimate objects.

3. See Bk. XIII, *Kurukṣetra*,—"The doctrine of Happiness".

man as a sentient architect of his own fate<sup>1</sup>, and hence the justification of the moral struggle within himself. Again,

Arjuna,

But is not Hari, the saviour of the fallen, able to blot out the decrees of fate ?

Vyāsa,

He can, if the fallen resign themselves, like the Pāndavas, to His feet.<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

Here, as in the *Bhakti-yoga* of the *Gītā*, the law of destiny has been superseded by the law of love, and the reconciliation of the conflicting elements has been rightly effected by Vyāsa in this book. Again, it may be noted that the mechanical deist of the *Raivataḥa*, arguing the present state of things as wholly providential, assumes in the *Kuruḥsetra* a thoroughly mystic note in his philosophy of life. The triumph over the ego, he reiterates, is the criterion of love and service, and, therefore, of resignation ; and by precept and practice Śrī-kṛiṣṇa has illustrated this in the great war of the *Mahabharata*.

What is good for the ocean is also good for the little drops of water that make the ocean ; and so what is good for the world is certainly good for you, oh my child ! control your senses by knowledge and practice, sink your personal interests in the interests of the world, do your duty according

1. কেন অতিকূল কৰ্ম কৰি আমি নৱ ?  
চৈতন্যেৰ বিষ আমি ! আমি ইচ্ছাময় !  
চেতনেৰ চেতনত কৰিছে নিৰ্ভৰ  
এ ইচ্ছাৰ স্বাধীনত্বে জান ধনঞ্জয় ।—*Pravāsa*, Bk. XII.

(Tr.) Why I, a man, should do anything that is opposed to my Duty ? I am an image of that supreme intelligence. I am the Will, and on the freedom of my will, Oh Dhananjaya, depends the consciousness of that intelligence.

2. অৰ্জুন, কিন্তু কৰ্মফলখেলা কৰিতে মোচন  
নাহি কি পাবেন হৰি পতিতপাবন ?  
ব্যাস, পাবেন—পতিত যদি আত্মসমৰ্পণ  
কৰে পাদপদ্মে তাঁৰ, পাণ্ডব যেনন । *Pravāsa*, Bk. XII.

to your own capacity and thus dedicate the fruits of your action to Brahmā. For what is the purpose that the tree is eternally serving by yielding fruits, or the cloud by yielding showers? The world is indeed a place for ideal unselfishness. It is the nature of the tree to give fruits and of the cloud to shower in the service of the world, and in that consists their highest act of merit which is not apart from salvation<sup>1</sup>. (Tr.) Bk. IV, *Kurukṣetra*.

## VII

This all-comprehensive principle of '*loka-śreya*' or the philanthropy of the Bhagabad-Gītā, is perhaps the only solution which any system of Philosophy can offer to the problem of human life. Poetry is at its best when it initiates us, by assuming what lies above and beyond an experience, into the significance of the actual experience. Nabinchandra's poetry is great, because it brings us to face the highest ideality which lies in the comprehension of the real<sup>2</sup>—the

Nabinchandra's  
ideal in poetry.

1. জলধির হিত যাহা তাহা জলবিন্দুহিত  
জগতের হিত বৎস ! তোমার হিত নিশ্চিত,  
অভ্যাস ও জ্ঞানবলে ইন্দ্রিয় করি সংযত  
জগতের হিতে করি নিজস্বার্থ পরিণত,  
স্বপ্রকৃতি অনুসারে স্বধর্ম কর পালন,  
এইরূপে কৰ্মফল বক্ষে করি সমর্পণ ।  
ফলিয়া অনন্ত তরু ; বরষিয়া মেঘদল,  
সাধিছে কি আপন স্বার্থ ? বিশ্ব আদর্শ নিকামস্থল -  
আপন প্রকৃতি মতে ফলে তরু, বর্ষে ঘন,  
জগতের হিতে সাধি স্বধর্ম মোক্ষপরম,

Bk. IV. *Kurukṣetra*.

2. অদ্বিতীয়, সর্বময়, সর্বভূত-মুলাধার  
যদি বৎস ! বিশ্বেশ্বর, বিশ্ব তবে রূপ তাঁর ।  
জ্ঞানাতীত বিষনাথে মানবের বৃদ্ধিবার  
বিশ্ব ভিন্ন নাহি বৎস ! সোপান দ্বিতীয় আর । *Ibid*.

(Tr.) If the Lord of the universe, oh my child, is all-pervading, the one-without-a-second, the source of every substance, the universe, then, is his garment without which there is no other way for man to realise Him who is beyond all knowledge.

highest message of Tennyson, Browning and Carlyle. Śrī-Kṛiṣṇa is himself a great poet even in his actual life of politics. He mystically disintegrates the jarring elements in the soul of India, and then produces, by a species of reaction, an atmosphere of harmony which is, and will be the basis of his ideal kingdom. Between the two scenes, the upholding of the illuminating wonder in the spirit of the universe<sup>1</sup>, and the soul-entrancing prophetic vision<sup>2</sup> of Śaila, there is only a process of purgation, of a sense of promise fulfilled, of vice lost and virtue redeemed. From the *Raivataka* down to the *Pravāsa* or to his later Avatar-hymnology<sup>3</sup>, the whole action is an ascent from our typical national and social evils as they were mostly prevalent during the ancient Hindu era, to a religion of pity and charity, from animal, sensuous fire, as it were, yielding place to a moral and humanitarian atmosphere; and in so far as Nabinchandra re-creates a passion for us, with all emphasis on love, an ideal religion for India based on brotherhood and self-suppression, he is a truly national poet of the nineteenth century in Bengal.

With all his debts to the West, which in his later works are too vague to be dissected and tabulated, it must, therefore, be said that Nabinchandra found his ideal of poetry in the expression of that divine afflatus or *Rasa*, the very soul of Indian literatures. Edgar Allen Poe's "intense and elevating excitement of the soul" only comes nearer to his imaginative flights, his exquisite abandon or self-surrender to the ultimate Reality. If we are to take his trilogy as merely a triumph of Hinduism, Fichte's definition of poetry as an expression of a religious idea, might be thought sufficient for the purpose<sup>4</sup>. Yet a better description

A definition of his poetry.

1. 1st Bk, *Raivataka*.
2. last Bk, *Pravāsa*.
3. *Amitava*, cf. Matthew Arnold's *Light of Asia*; See also *Amritava*, and *Christ*.
4. See 9th Bk, *Kuruksetra*.

of his poetry would be found in Prof. George Santayana's definition<sup>1</sup>, viz., poetry is metrical and euphuistic discourse expressing thought which is both sensuous and ideal. But all these elements are overshadowed by the great force of the poet's self-expression. He wrote most of himself because he saw in himself a type of his restless and synthetic epoch, because perhaps he realised that his spirit was the spirit of thousands of other youngmen in the generation to which he belonged.

Thus Nabinchandra's poetry is the poetry of impulse, and it is only in this sense that he may be called Byronic. This impulse is woven of three elements which contributed to the tremendous impression that he made upon his generation. There is, in the first place, his impassioned self-portrayal and self-assertion. This is the lyrical, introspective Nabinchandra, who, in the frankness of his poetic fervour, could not pause to master the great art of self-concealment. Of his irrepressible egoism his fascinating 'Autobiography' in prose is the highest expression. But the truth is that his lyrical emotion sometimes becomes obtrusive<sup>2</sup> in spite of its fine frenzy and spontaneity of outburst. Secondly, there is Nabinchandra, the patriot, the poet of *Palāśir Yuddha*, where he also played the rôle of the satirist and observer of the national mind, and kindled the soul of his people in a way that no other poet did. Thirdly, there is Nabinchandra, the Vaiṣṇava, the poet of the trilogy, and the poet of three 'prophets'. This is the true, the great, and the ultimate Nabinchandra, the poet of the emotional synthesis of Bengal in the last century. Only his emotional fervour sometimes runs into theatricality and unvaiṣṇavic conceits<sup>3</sup>. His slipshod method of composition in some books of the *Raivataḥa* and of the

Analysis of Nabinchandra's poetry.

1. *Poetry and Religion* by G. Santayana.

2. See last stanza, *Kuruksetra*.

3. See p. 158, *Pravāsa*.



*Kurukṣetra* are ill-fitted to his genius. He lacks the sense of proportion as we have seen in the *Raivataḥa* and particularly in the *Uttarā-Abhimanyu* episode<sup>1</sup> in the *Kurukṣetra*, while his predecessors have drawn similar episodes in their great epics in a smaller compass but with greater beauty.

### VIII

Yet it is ungracious to leave such a great poet—and greater he might have been—on this note of criticism. Two things he has done in a peculiar way that no other poet has yet achieved in our literature.

His contribution to our poetry.

For us he has recorded, as in a thermometer, the highest pulse-beats of the impulsive Bengalee character with that profound *elan* which is all his own. His fullness and restless lyrical abandon is indeed unique in our modern literature, as his poetry written in the white heat of the religious and spiritual inspiration is a legacy that transcends the limits of time and space. Nabinchandra's religion, if it belongs to any school, closely approximates to Keśavchandra's "New Dispensation." It is, as he himself has told us<sup>2</sup>, a universal religion not to be confined within particular church-creeds and articles of faith. It is this consciousness of his "vital relations to this mysterious universe, his duty and destiny there, that is in all cases the primary thing for him and creatively determines all the rest."<sup>3</sup> This apprehension is the very source of his inspiration, his ecstasy and religious mysticism. Poetry, according to Prof. Santayana, is called religion where it intervenes in life, and religion when it merely supervenes upon life, is seen to be nothing but poetry<sup>4</sup>. To define this distinction in a simpler way one may say, that

1. In *Abhimanyu's* description of his ideal castle before *Uttarā*, we find a striking parallel to Shelley's description of the same before *Emilia Viviani* in "Ehippsychidion".

2. See his preface to *Christ*.

3. Carlyle's *Heroes and Hero-worship*, Lecture I.

4. *Poetry and Religion* (preface) by G. Santayana.

poetry is the finer breath of religion, and the pressure of that resultant conviction of poetry on a life codified, is the seed of religion. Wordsworth may be taken as a typical example of this double process of thought. In his life of nature he found occasions both for poetry and didacticism. His poems are, however, mere documents of individual experiences, of tranquil pleasures born in the contemplation of things within the reach of his sensuous life. But when a poet enlarges his theatre and puts into his rhapsodies the true visions of his people and of his soul, his poetry is the consecration of his deepest convictions, and contains the whole truth of his religion<sup>1</sup> This is the final and unique contribution of Nabinchandra to our literature, and this, if not anything else, serves to carve out for him a niche in the temple of poetic fame.

1. *Poetry and Religion*, p. 289.

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## CHAPTER IX

### POETIC DICTION OF MADHUSŪDAN, HEMCHANDRA AND NABĪNCHANDRA

#### I

**A**N attempt has been made in the preceding pages to bring out the different temperaments of the three poets—objective, contemplative and subjective in their methods of approach towards their respective themes which have many points of contact in their plot-construction. The graceful energy of the first presents a contrast to the Puritanic zeal of the second, which is, again, supplemented in the liquid spiritual fire of the third. In other words, the aesthetic, the intellectual, and the emotional are the distinct features in their attitude to life, as in their treatment of poetry<sup>1</sup>. This distinction is also to be noticed in their conceptions of the hero-cult. The natural storm of human action present in a Greek hero is the starting-point of the *Meghanād-badh*. In Homer this storm has none of that subjective impetuosity displayed by the Bengali epic ; and so its final appeal is not Homeric in spirit. The long-drawn struggle between the Devas and Asuras in Hemchandra's *Britra-samhāra*

1. cf,           মথিয়া কবিত্ব-সিদ্ধি বঙ্গ-কবিগণ  
লইল বাঁটিয়া সুখা, অমরা বিভব ।  
রঙ্গলাল নিল শশী, নির্মল কিরণ  
নিল ঐরাবৎ মধু দ্বিতীর বাসব ;  
হেম নিল উচ্চৈশ্রবা গতি অতুলন,  
নবীন ধরিল বক্ষে কোমল দুর্ভ ;  
বিহারী করুণা লক্ষ্মী করুণ লোচন,  
রবি নিল পারিজাত ত্রিদিব দৌরভ  
And one feels tempted to add—  
হলাহল কণ্ঠে হল 'অক্ষয়' গৌরব

*Aksay Barāl's poetic estimate of these poets*

has been allegorically approached. The central heroic action is hardly veiled and has been lifted into the level of metaphysics. On a different plane and with a mystic view of things stands Śrī-Kṛṣṇa, the real hero of Nabinchandra's trilogy. Though as an Avatar, Śrī-Kṛṣṇa is not essentially different from Christ<sup>1</sup>, yet the former is very largely a creation of the Gītā with specific divine attributes not to be found in his fellow-Avatar.

## II

Rāṅgalāl's descriptive art is an illustration of cheap rhetoric justifiable only in his circumstances. By precious devices he wanted to produce effects, pleasing for simplicity and variety where it was difficult to have beauty. The metrical swing of Bhāratchandra, the romantic methods of Scott and Byron added to his genuine patriotic fervour, gave to his heroic representation the dignity and sincerity of primitive heroic poetry.

Michael's descriptions are distinctly typical but not mental as Homer's. The influence of the *Iliad*<sup>2</sup> is, for instance, visible in Michael's description of the heroes standing ready for the war<sup>3</sup>. But the Greek bard comes between nature and his readers as a connoisseur of the former, and in that sense his representations are mental. Michael specifies his portraits as typical of some particular passions or emotions. Some bold and firm outlines in the pictures, some striking movements, fragmentary but significant as we find in Homer, are found to characterise the great Bengalee poet. There is a uniqueness in the

1. By comparing verses 7-8, 4th Chapter in the Gītā with verses 7-27, 24th Chapter, in Matthew, Nabinchandra seeks to prove that essentially there is no difference between Kṛṣṇa and Christ in so far as they are Avatārs. See preface to "Christ,"

2. Bk. XI, 60-65.

3. *Meghanād-badh*, Bk. I.

glance<sup>1</sup> of the rising sun, a peculiar numbness<sup>2</sup> in the silence of Rāvana struck with grief, a certain frozen stateliness in the piteous narration<sup>3</sup> of Sītā, and an inimitable picturesqueness in the whole poetic diction. In fact, in miniature portrait-painting Madhusūdan still remains unsurpassed for it *finesse*; because with the fewest strokes the most delicate workmanship has been wrought by him in our poetry.

Where Madhusūdan condenses, Hemchandra amplifies and Nabinchandra etherealizes. If the first is nearly Homeric, the second is Miltonic<sup>4</sup> in his descriptive and narrative methods. As in Milton, much of the interest of Hemchandra's poem lies in his colossal pictures, in his lofty thought and in the supernatural grandeur of his situations. More than any other poet in the same field he was conscious of his position as an epic poet, and he makes a very scrupulous attempt probably on account of the adverse criticism of *Meghanād-badh*, for maintaining the balance of his characters on the heroic plane. Both in his thought and style he observes a high seriousness but a slovenliness and superficiality which is artistically fatal.

With the fluidity and the music of his poetic diction, Nabinchandra stands apart. His method is purely romantic. If there is a Byronic touch in the wild flights of his imagination there is, with all his indigenous inspiration, also a Shelleyan gesture in the spiritual emancipation of humanity which distinguishes his later poetry. Poetry and painting dwell together in the house of his passionate Muse, and so he can be justly likened in this respect to the English "pre-Raphaelite" poets of the last century. The very opening stanzas of *Palāśir Yuddha*—the divine damsels leaning out of the

1. See *Meghanād-badh* Bk., VII, Opening lines.

2. Bk. I.

3. Bk. IV.

4. Bk. I, *Britra-Sainhāra*.

windows of heaven, the cloud-laden stars pensively thinking, as it were, in their spheres set here, of course, against a lurid background, remind us of "the Blessed Damsel" of Dante Gabriel Rossetti. The beautiful love-lyric of Sulochanā (*Raivataḥa*) describing with a personal note the various stages of feminine love through the special traits of some typical flowers is an excellent example of this type of art. Possibly, the poet's inward allegiance to some such art is responsible for the extreme attention to realistic details in his portraits. And finally another "pre-Raphaelite" characteristic may be found in his love of symbolism<sup>1</sup> as seen in his trilogy which, through a group of individuals, proposes to explain the secret of the redemption of humanity.

### III

In conclusion it will be interesting to note the peculiarity of each poet in the employment of similes and metaphors in his poetry, for it will serve, as a rule, to indicate the complexion of his personal outlook on things. Madhusūdan's similes are as short and expressive as Homer's without the latter's perennial freshness and vigour, but this, of course, is bound to be so, because Homer's is believed to be an "epic of growth" as opposed to Michael's "epic of Art." The similes of the Greek epics, as we have said elsewhere, testify to a direct and minute observation of nature, while the Bengalee poet seldom chooses to track beyond the mythological allusions or the stock similes of Sanskrit literature. He is severely classical here, and one might almost say, distinctly Indian<sup>2</sup> in his style of expression. Even where his imaginative sympathy is at its highest, he confines himself to the more con-

Similes and metaphors : of Madhusūdan

1. Bk. V. p. 87, *Pravāsa*, Bk. XIII, *Raivataḥa* etc.

2. But such phrases, a critic remarks, as "দেবকুলপ্রিয়" "দম্ভোলি-নিষ্কপী", "ফুলকুলরমণী উবা" would inevitably remind one of Homer's "favoured of the gods" "cloud-compelling Jove" and "rosy-figured morn" etc. There are also other poetic renderings from Milton and Virgil.

ventional groove of things for his imagery. What is still Homeric with him is that his similes are never involved with his well-chiselled thoughts, and so are not allowed to obscure their transparency. They are the real beauties of his poetic diction in that they polish and concentrate his characterization. They have a hidden beauty of their own.

By virtue of his sense of the inter-relations of thought and matter, Hemchandra is extensive also in his metaphors and similes. He

Of Hemchandra

draws them mostly from his universal consciousness of nature and man. The application of Hemchandra's similes is generally elaborate and continuous.<sup>1</sup> With this art he amplifies things, as his predecessor thereby rarefies them. Hemchandra uses them to adorn a landscape either in the physical or in the mental world, while in Madhusūdan they serve as tools for refining his portraits.

The similes and metaphors of Nabinchandra are no mere poetic ornaments, but are more direct and spontaneous, as they spring from

Of Nabinchandra

his free-flowing Muse and with the highest intensity of his emotion burst, like breakers, into different and more comprehensive channels. So they are organically connected with his poetry, and form particularly in his later productions, the very warp and woof of his imaginative execution. Here we may find the symptom of his "pre-Raphaelite" contagion which, if it is not a fact, still serves to show how differences of climes and conditions notwithstanding, a strange fellowship binds all great poets to strike not simply on the same chords—at times to the same pitch and in the same manner—of the Aeolian harp of the poetic imagination.

1. See Bk. VI. 132-142, *Brītra-Sainhāra*; Bk. IX, Śachi describing her son fallen asleep in her lap; Jayanta's defeat and fainting fit,—*Ibid*; Bk. XII, description of the gods shining in the battle fields. Bk. XIII, 6-15 etc. *Chintā-taraṅgiṇī*, Pp. 6-7, (Basumati Edition); lines 30-38, Pp. 6-7.

## INTERCHAPTER IV

BIOGRAPHY OF BIHĀRĪLĀL CHAKRABERTĪ (1836-1894)\*

**T**HE true poet is all knowing ; he is a world in miniature,' so said Novalis about the epic greatness of poets. And it was also a kindred sentiment that was struck by another philosophical scribe<sup>1</sup> of ours in the last century with reference to Bihārīlāl, the poet : 'Bihārīlāl', he observed, 'was a far greater poet than his poetry tends to show him, and though with him poetry was bred in the bone', it did not perhaps come out all in the flesh.

Bihārīlāl was born in 1836 at the ancestral residence of his father Dinanāth Chakrabertī, which was situated on Aksaychandra Dutt Lane in Nimtolā Street at Calcutta. Being the only child in the family, the poet naturally had the monopoly of the parents' affections, but unfortunately he lost his mother within three years of his birth. Tall, fair, and strong Bihārīlāl was a boy of active habits, almost of riotous but heroic nature, and could swim across the Ganges twice or thrice over with perfect ease. It is said that one of his youthful skirmishes led to his being struck on the head by his enemy. He was bleeding profusely ; and yet his chivalrous temperament did not let him disclose the truth of the matter to a neighbouring policeman who was naturally curious to find out the author of the assault. On another occasion, as one<sup>2</sup> of his contemporaries tells us, Bihārīlāl was passing along the Strand Road when he was confronted by a 'tommy' tearing down from the opposite side. In such a case 'the honours of the pavement' are usually claimed by the military people. But here the soldier stared him in the face, and let him have his own way.

About Bihārīlāl's schooling we know that he read at home upto the age of nine, browsing at will on anything he liked, and it is said that the *Bat-tolā* publications attracted him most. Between ten and fifteen he was on the rolls of the General Assembly's Institution, and for three years later he remained a scholar of Sanskrit College. But the rough-

\* Chiefly based upon Rasamaya Lāhā's paper on "Rishi Sukabi Bihārīlāl" appended to the *Basumatī* edition of the poet's works.

1. Dwijendranāth Tagore.

2. Kṛṣṇakamal Bhattāchāryya.



and-ready discipline of studies in these academies proved too much for his unruly character. He was the cock of his school, and in more respects than one he was to these institutions what Dobbin was to Dr. Swishtail's Academy in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*

Nevertheless Bihārīlāl's range of studies was fairly wide. We have it on the authority of the same contemporary that he read Byron's *Childe Harold*, the great tragedies of Shakespeare, works of Kālidāsa, and almost all the classics of Bengali literature, particularly Kabikāṅkan Chandi, and Vaiṣṇava lyrics, all of which he studied from the artistic point of view.

His scholarship.

Bihārīlāl's first wife having died in childbed he married the daughter, called Kādambinī Devī, of Nabinchandra Mukhopādhyaya of Bowbazar Street ; and there are internal evidences<sup>1</sup> to show that he was quite happy with her.

His married life.

More than any other Bengalee poet of the age Bihārīlāl lived his poetry : If it was passionate, sincere, and idealistic, so was his life ; if it was instinct with generous enthusiasms and beautiful dreams, so was he too in the practical conduct of his existence. His spirit, like Shelley's, was always haunted by the tragedies and tyrannies of the social order which gave a rude shock to the world of his dreams. Acutely sensitive to all that is lovely in sight or sound, he wrote his verses under the stress of simple and fundamental emotions, and he sang the truth as he saw it and felt it with the sincerity of a primitive poet. To the composition of poetry he devoted the bulk of his time and energy in youth, though the entire output of his works, fairly large in quantity, will shine most in selection :

His poetical works.

Bandhu-biyoga	... 1858.
Bāṅgasundarī	... 1869.
Prema-Prabāhini	... 1870.
Nisarga-sandarśan	... 1870.
Sāradāmaṅgal I	... 1874.
Sāradāmaṅgal II	... 1879.

Bihārīlāl died in 1894 of chronic diabetes at the age of 58.

1. "Nisānta-Saṅgit," *Sarat-kāl*.

## CHAPTER X

### BIHARILAL AND ENGLISH POETS

‘NEITHER the full glare of light nor the darkness of the night, but the misty phase of the twilight—that is of the essence of the dream,’<sup>1</sup> so wrote Bihārīlāl Chakrabarti in one of his earliest compositions ; and what seems only a casual explanation of the significance of the dream-element in life may be usefully applied to interpret the real nature of Bihārīlāl’s poetry with reference to its artistic value and its relation to the age.

Bihārīlāl’s life, in itself a noble and serious ‘poem,’ covers that period of the Renaissance in Bengal which saw a host of reforms in every direction crowded within a brief space of years. Brave, tender and sincere in his life he lived without fear or favour ; loving, gentle and forgiving his sympathies were worthy of a great poet. His was an iron will tempered by sweetness and light. An orthodox Hindu yet sharing most of the liberal views of the reform-movements, a dreamer whose dreams were woven out of the terrible realities of his people, Bihārīlāl was of his age but not confined in it.

His literary apprenticeship began with a keen interest in the indigenous *Jātrās*, *Pāñchālīs* and in the songs of the Kaviwallas which were the only living literature of the time. He found great delight in Vaiṣṇava poetry but his most favourite poets were Vālmiki, Kālidāsa and Bhababhūti ; and as quotations at the head of many poems will show, his mastery of Shakespeare, Byron, and Shelley appears to be equally thorough.

1. Vide *Bandhubīyoga*.

With an independent, self-reliant and sensitive nature such as the poet possessed, it was only natural that as a young man he would first turn his affections to things which were insistently knocking at the door.

His connection with the age.

The sorrows of his people brought on at the time by a series of desolating famines offered for him a theme of absorbing interest. The apathy of an unstable government together with the indifference of the enlightened aristocracy to the primary needs of the masses made any attempt at relief out of the question. Religion and Education held the ground. The intelligentsia of the country drunk in the heady wine of Western learning and civilization, were fiddling while their country was burning. Such was the terrible state of things which had revolted the poet's conscience, and had made him record his wild indignation in a prose rhapsody, *Swapnadarshan*, a dream-narrative, at about the year 1856.<sup>1</sup>

The first poetical composition *Bandhubiyoga* (written in 1858 in memory of his past friends who were, according to the poet "full many a gem of purest ray serene") which is, of course, the last in literary merit, is important only for its note of regret for the unfortunate position that women occupied in the society. It was high time, so the poet argued, that the old order should have changed and given place to a new and humane policy of treatment towards our women; the ban of statutory disability on them must be removed and the senseless tyranny of the society must come to an end.

Tr. It is easy for the son to find shelter at the house even though he is a confirmed sinner. But the slightest touch of sin damns the daughter for ever. Oh, how long would such glaring injustice reign supreme in society! <sup>2</sup>.

1. It appears that the famine which the poet describes occurred in 1856.

2. অনাসে দুঃস্বাদ পুত্র গৃহে স্থান পায়  
পাপস্পর্শ মাত্র কিন্তু কষ্টা ভেসে যায়।  
কত দিন আর হায় কত দিন আর,  
অবাধে চলিবে এই যোঁর অবিচার।

Cf. the note of dissatisfaction on such preferential treatment of males in Hemchandra's *Chintātarangini*.

This was, however, a negative criticism. Something positive should also be done towards female education', and above all, means

The poet as the reformer of women's position.

must be found to arrest the growth of immoral traffic in the country and to improve the miserable lot of the fallen women whom we are wont to view with contempt and not with that pity and charity which they deserve.

First try to arrest the fall, for which mere words will be of no use. Stand up abreast all in a body, and take into your arms whoever falls low. For those, again, who are fallen, ring down the ladder, and raise them, step by step, with a loving heart and warm hand. Only in such an action can your energy justify itself, for which you can enjoy the peace of true heroism. The day our society will come to accept this scheme, humanity will find its salvation.

It is impossible to blink such a charitable impulse of reform as a salutary change in the social outlook of the age. But how should one

Western influence in the conception.

account for its origin? Certainly not in Bihārīlāl as the first solitary voice in the country, but obviously in the reforming activities of the Brāhmo Samāj with its wide-eyed preachers fed by the original movement in England and France (original only with regard to the present

1. Vide *Bandhubiyoga*, 4th Canto.

অগ্রে চেষ্টা কর সেই পতন থামাতে,  
কিছুই হবে না কিন্তু কেবল কথাতে।  
সকলে একত্র হয়ে ছাতি পেতে থাক,  
যে পড়িছে তাহাতেই বুক দিয়ে রাখ।  
পড়িয়ে গিয়েছে যারা তাহাদের তরে,  
নরকে নামায়ে দাও সিঁড়ি ধরে ধরে।  
উদার অন্তরে গিয়ে স্নেহে হাত ধরি,  
আশু আশু তুলে আন উপরি উপরি।  
তা'হইলে ভেজোমান চরিতার্থ হবে,  
যথার্থ বীরের স্থায় মনস্থখে রবে।  
যে দিন এমনি হবে সমাজ-সংস্থান,  
সেই দিন মুক্তি পাবে মানব-সন্তান!

“বন্ধুবিদ্যোগ” ১ম সর্গ

feminist movement in India) that one must seek to trace the germs of the revolution in the social position of our women. That a society like ours which was dead to any consideration for the lamentable position of its women, should suddenly find earnest souls ready to admit them to equal rights and privileges with men, must appear as a miracle, unless we postulate the intrusion<sup>1</sup> of some foreign force relaxing the time-honoured orthodoxy of our social constitution.

The poet's connection with the age should, therefore, be sought chiefly in his sympathy for womanhood, which finds better expression

The poet as an early feminist in our poetry. in a later poem entitled *Bāṅga-sundarī*<sup>2</sup>, and which will suggest how

he anticipates, in this sphere, the positivistic ideal of Bankimchandra in the latter's regenerative conception of society. Meanwhile let us consider the two intervening pieces *Prema-prabāhīnī* and *Nisarga-sandarśan*, which occasionally reveal glimpses of the poet's distinct and intimate personality.

This poem<sup>3</sup>, as the very title indicates, is a search for the presence of love in the universe. On human love he cannot rely, for his bitter experiences of the world end in a rude awakening about the reality of such love, of which he finds an echo in the most cynical observations of Hamlet. Cut off from man he, therefore,

*Prema-prabāhīnī.*

1. We have already noticed this in the rise of a group of Women-Poets.
2. Surendranāth Majumdar is more reflective on the point.
3. The purport of the whole poem may be brought out by the following stanza :—

Alas, that love should be a blight and snare  
To those who seek sympathies in one — I  
Such once I sought in vain ; then black despair,  
The shadow of a starless night, was thrown  
Over the world in which I moved alone :—  
Yet never found I one not false to me,  
Hard hearts, and cold, like weights of icy stone  
Which crushed and withered mine, that could not be  
Aught but a lifeless cold, until revived by thee.

Dedication, VI, *The Revolt of Islam*.

seeks in the manner of romantic poets to discover love and beauty in the sights and sounds of Nature.

Tr. :—Now does the poet make the grim resolve that he would no longer see the face of love in this life, nor would he, like the thirsty deer, be deluded by the mirage into the burning sand of the desert. Never will his heart break or bleed. Lost in the sacred love of nature he would rather see the image of God-in-love in his heart. Tears of joy will run down in steady streams and the apples of his eyes will remain gazing. The flowers of the garden, the stars in the sky and all the myriad children of Nature will sympathise with the poet, for the flowers will fall in showers on his head and the stars will rain down their beam upon his eye-lids, and the wind and the bees will be humming sweet and sad lullabies about him.<sup>1</sup>—*Prema-Prabāhīnī*.

The quest of the mystery of Love and Beauty in nature, then, becomes the sole preoccupation with the poet. In the nebulous state of his poetic intelligence when he was free from this obsession, he says, he learnt, though without any degree of conviction, that love was the common cause of everything. But with the gradual awakening of his senses he found the presence of love visiting this 'various world.'

Love and Beauty  
in nature.

I.

স্থিরতর প্রতিজ্ঞা করেছে নিজমনে,  
দেখিবেনা প্রেমমুখ আর এ জীবনে।  
জলভ্রমে যুগ আর যাইবেনা ছুটে,  
তপ্ত বালুকায় আর পড়িবেনা লুটে।  
যাবেনা হৃদয় তার হইয়া বিদার,  
ছুটিবেনা অঙ্গ বয়ে কথিরের ধার।  
প্রকৃতি-পবিত্র-প্রেমে হইয়া মগন,  
হেরিবে হৃদয়ে প্রেমময় সনাতন।  
দরদর আনন্দের ব'বে অশ্রুধারা,  
স্থির হয়ে রবে ভ্রুটি নয়নের তারা।  
প্রকৃতির পুত্র সব হবে অমুকুল,  
আকাশের তারা আর কাননের ফুল;  
ফুলগুলি ঝ'রে ঝ'রে পড়িবে মাথায়,  
তারকা কিরণ দিবে চোখেয় পাতায়।  
পবন ভ্রমর আদি হুল্ললিত স্বরে,  
চারিদিকে বেড়াবে করুণ গান করে। প্রেম-প্রবাহিণী, তৃতীয় সর্গ

Tr. In sea, or land, or air wherever I cast a glance I find the presence of thy image.<sup>1</sup>

And curiously enough, he too feels a sense of moral indignation at the low position not only of his motherland but also of an "oppressed" country like the 'Post-Columbus' America, against 'the harsh and grating strife of tyrants and of foes'<sup>2</sup>. A 'serener hour', however, descended on him when, leaving humanity out of consideration, he became absorbed in the pursuit of Intellectual Beauty, and here his debt to Shelley is perhaps most apparent :—

Tr. On many occasions in the perfect midnight silence of nature broken only by the exquisite strains of the night-  
ingale against the starry brilliance of the sky glittering like  
an endless canopy set with jewels have I wandered, as far  
as my eyes could go from one locality to another, in the  
streets of this city illumined by gas-lamps and guarded by  
the drowsy sentinels in their swaying gait.

But I have sought her in vain, though I have seen and heard of her presence in various ways.<sup>3</sup>—*Prema-prabāhini*, Sec. 5.

১. কি জলে স্থলে শূন্যে যে দিকেতে চাই  
বিরাজিত তব ছবি দেখিবারে পাই।

2. Vide Canto V, P. 29.

3. কতদিন এ নগরে নিশীথ সময়ে,  
 যে সময়ে নিসর্গ রয়েছে স্তব্ধ হয়ে ;  
 ব্যোমময় তারা সব করে দপ দপ,  
 যেন মণি-খচিত অসীম চন্দ্রাতপ ;  
 কোন দিকে কোন রব নাহি শুনা যায়,  
 কভু মাত্র “পিয়ু কাঁহা” ইঁাকে পাপিয়ায় ;  
 গ্যাসের আলোক আছে পথ আলো কোরে,  
 প্রহরীর দেহ টলমল ঘুমঘোরে ;  
 কিরিয়াছি পথে পথে পাড়ায় পাড়ায়,  
 যেখানে ছুঁচোথ গেছে, গিয়াছি সেথায় ;  
 \* \* \* \* \*
- শুনেছি দেখেছি হেন বিবিধ প্রকার,  
 কোন পথে কোন চিহ্ন পাইনি তোমার ।

“শ্রোম-শ্রবাহিনী”, ৫ম সর্গ।

And compare with this the more solemn and passionate lines of Shelley,

In lone and silent hours,  
When night makes a weird sound of its own  
stillness,  
Like an inspired and desperate alchemist  
Staking his very life on some dark hope,  
Have I mixed awful talk and asking looks  
With my most innocent love, until strange tears  
Uniting with those breathless kisses, made  
Such magic as compels the charmed night  
To render up thy charge.....and.....ne'er yet  
Thou hast unveiled thy inmost sanctuary.....

*Alastor, 29-38.*

Again,

Many a whole dark night have I spent in the solitary grandeur on the roof of my house. The entire universe covered by the thick pall of darkness would not command vision of even two cubits' length; and wherever my eyes were cast the abysmal depths of infernal blackness appeared to me shadowing forth vividly the image of the doomsday itself. Heaven melted into lower regions till it was lost in an endless sea of darkness which, whenever I saw it, conjured up before my mind only the picture of Destruction, and brought my imagination to rest on 'charnels and coffins,' all enveloped in darkness and vacancy. The dismal graves filled me with wonder and unrest, and set my mind meditating on those countries which have been embedded in the bowels of the earth, which with the faintest traces lost have passed beyond the stage of human inquiry, and are now reduced to mere legends of the purāṇas<sup>1</sup>—

*Prema-Pvabāhini.*

I.

কত অমা ত্রিয়ান্ন হৃদয়ের উপর,  
সারা রাত কাটায়েছি বসি একেশ্বর।  
তিমির সজ্জাতে বিশ্ব গাঢ় ধ্বাস্ত্রময়,  
তুই হস্ত দৃষ্টি নাহি প্রসারিত হয়।  
যে দিকেতে চাই, সব অন্ধতমকুপ,  
যেন মহাপ্রলয়ের স্পষ্ট প্রতিরাপ।  
নভ হতে নেবে গেছে তলাতল,  
অসীম তিমিরসিক্ত রয়েছে কেবল।  
যত দেখিতাম সেই ঘোর অন্ধকার,  
উদিতো হৃদয়ে সব সংহার-আকার।

(continued)



Against this we find in *Alastor* :—

I have watched

Thy shadow, and the darkness of thy steps,  
And my heart ever gazes on the depth  
Of thy deep mysteries. I have made my bed  
In charnels and on coffins, where black death  
Keeps record of the trophies won from thee,  
Hoping to still these obstinate questionings  
Of thee and thine, by forcing some lone ghost,  
Thy messenger, to render up the tale  
Of what we are. ll. 20-29

And like Shelley, Bihārīlāl too indulges in a 'high talk with the departed dead', as well as in a reflection on the general oblivion to which he, along with the rest of mankind, will be consigned, while seeming to echo a portion of the famous 'suicide-soliloquy' of Hamlet :—

Bihārīlāl's preoccupation with death.

I shall go to that undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveller has returned as yet to this world<sup>1</sup>—*Prema-prabāhīnī*

লয়ে যেতো মন মোরে সঙ্গে সঙ্গে কোরে,  
শূন্যময় তমোময় স্থানে-কবরে ।  
বিবাদে আচ্ছন্ন সব সমাধির স্থান,  
দেখিয়া বিষয়ে হ'ত ব্যাকুল পরাণ ।  
যত ভাবিতাম মন করি সন্নিবেশ  
ততই জাগিত মনে সেই সব দেশ ;  
যে সবার চিহ্ন আর দেখা নাহি যায়,  
যে সবার কোন কথা কেহ না হুধায়,  
পুরাণে কাহিনীমাত্র, রয়েছে নির্দেশ,  
ধরণীর গর্ভে মগ্ন ভগ্ন অবশেষ ।

প্রেম-প্রবাহিনী, ৫ম সর্গ ।

1.

চলে যাব সেই অনাবিষ্কৃত দেশ,  
হয় নাই যার কোন কিছুই নির্দেশ ।  
অজ্ঞাবধি কোন রাজী যার সীমা হতে,  
ফিরিয়া আসেনি পুনঃ আর এ জগতে ।

Cf.—That undiscover'd country from whose bourn, no traveller returns  
—(Act III, 1.—Hamlet's soliloquy).

Thus both the poets may be said to have run after their Intellectual Beauty in caves and coffins, in hills and dales<sup>1</sup>, in storms and earthquakes. But a moral crisis came to them when, in apparent disillusionment, they were wringing their hands in despair :

Beauty of the ugly  
and the poet's despair.

When nothing served me to find thee out, I gave myself up for lost. The whole world seemed to be a dark and desolate desert, within and without. A train of futile thoughts visited my heart till my heart could stand the burden no longer. I screamed aloud piteously, "oh, where art thou ! Be pleased to see me," when thy light fell upon me, and I found in the heart the shadow of that beauty that charms the whole universe<sup>2</sup>.—*Prema-prabāhinī*.

And almost similar was Shelley's experience in boyhood,

While yet a boy I sought for ghosts, and sped,  
Through many a listening chamber, cave and ruin,  
And starlight wood, with fearful steps pursuing  
Hopes of high talk with the departed dead.  
I called on poisonous names with which our youth  
is fed ;

I was not heard—I saw them not—  
When musing deeply on the lot  
Of life, at that sweet time when winds are wooing  
All vital things that wake to bring  
News of birds and blossoming,—  
Sudden, thy shadow fell on me ;  
I shrieked, and clasped my hands in ecstasy !

*Hymn to Intellectual Beauty, V.*

1. Vide 5th canto.

2. কিছুতেই যখন তোমারে না পেলেম,  
একেবারে আমি যেন কি হয়ে গেলেম !  
শূন্যময় ভ্রমোময় বিশ্বসমুদ্র,  
অন্তর বাহির শুষ্ক, সব মরুভূমি ।  
আসিয়ে যেবিল বিড়ম্বনা সারি সারি  
হৃৎকর হৃদয়-ভার সহিতে না পারি ;  
কাতর চীৎকার-স্বরে ডাকিছু তোমার,  
কোথা, ওহে দেখা দাও আসিয়ে আমার ।  
অমনি হৃদয়ে এক আলোকে পুরিত,  
মাঝে বিশ্ববিমোহন রূপ বিরাজিত ।

✓ From these considerations it may be concluded that *Alaslor* and "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" went largely to the making of (*Prem-pra-bāhini* though occasionally *Kalidāsa* and *Shakespeare* were laid under contribution by him; and that, if any Bengalee poet, more consistently than any of the rest, approaches Shelley in his ethereality, morality, sublimity (should we not also add 'ineffectuality' ?), and even in the fidelity to his poetical creed or in his inclination in life to be 'wise, just, free and mild',<sup>1</sup> it is, without doubt, *Bihārīlāl Chakrabarti*.

Resemblances between *Bihārīlāl* and Shelley.

*Nisarga-śandarsan* is a representation of nature in her solemn and stormy aspects, a combination of which in poetry tends to create that sense of mystery and wonder which is the very essence of Romanticism. It belongs to that school of poetry where the lyrical enjoyment of nature in all her varying moods is a study and a conscious art, and which, it may be said, came into our own chiefly through our close acquaintance with English poetry.

*Nisarga-sandars'an* and English romanticism.

The poet starts the first section of this poem with a head-line evidently quoted from Shelley's "stanzas written in Dejection near Naples."

A comparison.

The glory of the scenic background of nature offers, in both cases, a sad contrast to the rougher ways of the world. Both are counsels of despair though, unlike Shelley, the Bengalee poet would, when everything repels him, seek refuge in the enjoyment of his intellectual and spiritual meditations.

The second section, *Samudra-darśan*, was inspired, we are told, by a sight of the sea at Puri. But even a superficial comparison will lead one to believe to that it was inspired more by a vision of Byron's

"*Samudra-darśan*" and Byron's "*Ocean*".

1. See *Purāṇa Prasāṅga*, p. 172, by *Krishnakamal Bhattachāryya*.

“Ocean”<sup>1</sup> than by his actual vision of the ocean he is said to have visited. Here he begins with an innocent quotation from Kālidāsa, and the unwary reader may be lured away from the strategic point of his inglorious debt to a foreign poet. It is ‘inglorious’ because of the slovenly way in which he has sought to adapt a mightier ‘ocean’ that has ridiculously ‘dashed’ his Muse to earth in the playful energy of its wild breakers.

One would only be tempted to quote both the poems *in toto* to reveal their identity in ideas and expressions, but a few specimens, particularly the underlined sentences and phrases which seem to be little more than translations, will show that what can be easily proved is not worth proving.

Byron's influence too evident.

*Roll on, Roll on, thou (ocean) in thine own way, heedless of my sad elegy, and let the sight of thy mighty form soothe the sore heart of this wretched self. For nothing in the world can move the human mind as much to the ecstasy of wonder as that thou art the glorious mirror of nature, and the epitome of the entire universe. \* \* \* \* Blinded by his pride of machines man sweeps over thee in his fleet, and fancies that he has brought thee under his control, and can do with thee whatever he wills without the least fear. But he can hardly stand even a frowning blink, for in the twinkling of thy imperious eye he finds the whole world a perfect void, and is tossed aside on his skidding sail. Swamped completely by the uproar of mighty breakers he raises a plaintive cry or two like the panicky osprey (kururi) in the stormy wood, when alas ! he, a clayey doll on a raft, sinks for ever into thy depths with a bubbling groan.<sup>2</sup> I see thee rolling in the same way as was seen by Manu in the Golden Age. Time only rolls on with thee, but cannot write its power on thee.*

\* \* \* \*

Farewell, mighty ocean, farewell for to-day !<sup>3</sup>

1. *Childe Harold*, IV. It should be remembered that Bihārīlāl read *childe Harold* thoroughly. See “Biography”.

2. Alas ! Here the Muse of Bihārīlāl also sinks in the English ‘ocean’ with ‘bubbling groan.’

3. গড়াও গড়াও তুমি আগনার মনে !

কাজ নাই শুনে এই গীত খেদময় ; (continued)

The rest of the poem has no great literary quality to recommend it except in the graphic descriptions of storms which, in some rhetorical and metrical points, remind us of his predecessor Bhāratchandra and in their fierce energy the Romantic poets like Shelley and Byron.

The rest of the poem.

তোমার উদাররূপ হেরিয়ে নয়নে,  
জুড়াক এ অভাগার তাপিত হৃদয় ।  
ধরাধামে তব সম কেহ নাহি পারে,  
বিশ্ব-আনন্দ-রসে আলোড়িত মন ;  
অখিল ব্রহ্মাণ্ড আছে তোমার ভাঙারে,  
নিসর্গের তুমি এক বিচিত্র দর্পণ ।  
\* \* \* \*  
কলের জাহাজ চোড়ে মানব সকলে,  
দম্ভভরে চোখে আর দেখিতে না পায় ;  
মনে করে তোমারে এনেছে করতলে,  
যা খুসী করিতে পারে, কিছু না উরায় ।

কিন্তু তব ক্রক্ষেপের ভর নাহি সম ;  
একমাত্র অবজ্ঞার কটাক্ষ ইঙ্গিতে,  
একেবারে ত্রিভুবন হেরে শূন্যময়,  
কাত হয়ে শুয়ে পড়ে জাহাজ সহিতে ।

চতুর্দিকে তরঙ্গের মহাকোলাহলে,  
উঠে মাত্র আন্তনাদ দুই একবার ;  
যেমন ঝড়ের সঙ্গে উঠে বনস্থলে,  
ভয়াকুল কুররীর কাতর চীৎকার ।

দুই একবার মাত্র ভুড় ভুড় করে,  
মুহুর্তে মিলায়ে যায় বৃন্দবৃন্দের শ্রায় ;  
মাটির পুতুল চোড়ে ভেলার উপরে,  
জনমের মত হায় রসাতলে যায় ।

সত্যযুগে আদি মনু যেমন তোমায়  
হেরেছেন, হেরিতেছি আমিও তেমন ;  
কাল তব সঙ্গে শুধু গড়ায়ে বেড়ায়,  
জাহির করিতে নারে বিক্রম আপন ।

\* \* \* \*  
উদার সাগর দাও বিদায় আমায় !  
আজিকার মত আমি আসি তবে আসি ।

## CHAPTER XI

### BIHARĪLAL AS A MYSTIC THINKER

**WE** have just examined the early performances of the poet which are largely imitative. We may now enter into the second period marked as much by a freer hand at poetic art as by the maturer philosophy of that new stream of thought which we have already noticed in the first poems.

This new thought is associated with women-problem which began to raise its head even with the first generation of educated youths of Bengal. In 1815 Sir Rādhākānta Deb, the most powerful opponent of the Sutee movement, composed a book named *Strīśikṣā-bidhāyaḥ* in which he presented a stout defence of female education in our country. This was followed by Rājā Rāmmohan's *Prabartak O Nibartak*\* published serially in three parts. With the help of Reason and the Śāstras, the Rājā gave a home-thrust to the opponents of Female emancipation. Naturally he rallied in his support instances of illustrious women who occupied high position in the society owing to their intellectual attainments from the time of the Vedas and the Upaniṣads down to the Classical Sanscrit era. But it was only with the introduction of the Mahomedan rule that the curtain of obscurity and total neglect was gradually falling upon her till in the sixteenth century the ironhand of Raghūnandan chose to relegate her to the position of something even less than domestic chattle. From

\* Other tracts of the Rājā on allied subjects are :—

(i) Brief remarks regarding Modern Encroachments on the Ancient Rights of Females according to the Hindu Law of Inheritance (1822).

(ii) Essay on the Rights of Hindus over Ancestral Property according to the Law of Bengal (1830).

(iii) Abstract of the Arguments regarding the Burning of Widows considered as a religious rite (1830).

Raghūnandan to Rāmmohan is an era of systematic persecution and negation for our woman at every step of her life. This artificial degradation of her position was, according to the Rājā, the main cause of the rite of satee in the country.

With the Sutee Act of 1829 promulgated against tremendous odds by Lord Bentinck and the Rājā, our women may be supposed to have set their feet on a far safer ground ; but their recognition as individual human beings was not complete until the doors of Education<sup>1</sup> were opened to them in 1849, until the great Pandit Išvarchandra Vidyāsāgar had managed to see his Widow-Re-marriage Bill passed into law, or until Keśavchandra Sen had flung the grating doors of his house to come out with his wife into the open<sup>2</sup>, and allowed her to join the proceedings of the Brāhmo Samāj.

The agitation that was at first social and moral naturally extended its influence to the domain of literature as well ; and as the movement had two sides, the conservatives and the liberals ranged themselves into two hostile camps, the former having Išvarchandra Gupta as its bitter advocate, and the latter having Bihārīlāl, Surendranāth Majumdar and Hemchandra Banerjea etc., as its earnest and valiant knights in the field of poetry.

Bihārīlāl's *Baṅgasundarī* which has ample affinity with Surendranāth's *Mahila* (1880) seeks to represent the general tenor of life and environments of Bengalee women. Pity, charity and fidelity are, in a special sense, their common attributes ; and yet their life, the poet regrets to add, is generally a story of sorrows and disappointments. "Nārī-bandanā" (the first section of the poem)

1. For a short sketch of Female Education See Chapter VIII—*A History of Hindu civilization during British Rule*, Vol. III by P. N. Bose. For a sketch of missionary activities for Female education, See "Bhāratbarāṇa," B. S. 1342, Bhādra.

2. *Life of Keśavchandra Sen* by P. C. Majumdar.

is really a hymn<sup>1</sup> of praise to their unacknowledged services to humanity, to their natural power to guide and console. There are, again, occasional touches of frivolity in the satire levelled against our legalised injustice towards women<sup>2</sup> who are depicted as wondering, as we find in this section, why their educated men should even then<sup>3</sup> have moved in the old grooves of their unchivalrous ancestors.

The poem is a personal account of the position that our women held in the society of the time. It is

Its theme.

mainly a narration of stories presumably within the experience of the poet himself, interspersed with such general reflections on woman's common attributes as would tend to transmute her as a regulative principle in the life of man. Her kindness and sympathy is illustrated by an incident described in the fifth section in which the cue seems to have been taken, at least in the latter part, from Byron's *Childe Harold* (to lanthe, St. 2.) prefixed to it by the poet himself.

The section *Chira-Parādhinī* is a bitter diatribe put into her mouth, against the purdah system with all its attendant evils. She is represented

Futility of mere book-learning.

here to have developed a new sense of her utility to the society and of her potentiality as a human being<sup>4</sup>. As a type of the poet's age she is seen resuming, with a sort of amused indifference, the study of her old dusty books worn out by disuse, but she regrets and that rightly too, the futility of the privilege of book-lore newly bestowed on her. What a terrible force, if not a fraud, so she argues, is

1. আমার মনে হয় কোঁৎ (Comte) যদি এইটা পাইতেন, তাহা হইলে তাঁহার ধ্রুবধর্মের গাথাসমূহ মধ্যে (hymns of Positive religion) ইহাকে সর্বপ্রথম ও সর্বোচ্চ স্থান দিতে অগ্রসর হইতেন"—( ভারতবর্ষ, পৌষ ১৩২০ ) কৃষ্ণকমল ভট্টাচার্য্য।

2. See *Banga-sundarī*, Sec. 4.

3. Mark the word "জ্ঞানের আলোক" which evidently means "Western knowledge."

4. *Ibid*, verses 34-41.



her education bound to be, when it is removed from nature, as it then was, by the thick impenetrable barrier of the purdah! When nature remains a sealed book and humanity a fairy tale, what else of education remains to her!

Thus do I live fed by my lord and housed within my lord's cage, as if I am not on good terms with the outside world, or as it were I have nothing to do with it at all. To me the book is a terrible puzzle; its images are beyond me, and no wonder, for mere words cannot convey any idea of the reality which I have never seen for myself! The forest and the pleasure-garden, the hills and the sea, the village and the hamlet, the bower and the fountain and the undulating ripples on the surface of the river—they are nothing more than fables to me!—

*Bāgasundarī*, "Chira-Parādhini," 4th. Sec.

Space does not permit an extensive use of quotations which one could make from this section to show the stern critic in the poet, and the strong advocate that he was, of her freedom from the purdah, or to illustrate that this was the outcome of, the unconscious imitation of English manners, or rather of a deeper

Revolt against the  
purdah.

১৯

১. আমার সহিত সেই জনতার,  
যেন কোনো কিছু হুবাদ নাই;  
যেন কোনো কিছু ধারিনে তাহার,  
থাকি প্রভু-ঘরে প্রভুরই থাই।

২০

বই নিয়ে বসে বিবম বিপদ,  
বুঝিতে পারিনে উপমা তার;  
বুঝি বা কেমনে শুনিয়া শব্দ,  
হেরি নাই কভু স্বরূপ যার।

২১

বন, উপবন, ভূধর, সাগর,  
ভরঙ্গ লহরী নদীর বুকে;  
গ্রাম, উপগ্রাম, নিকুঞ্জ, নিষর,  
শুনিলাম শুধু লোকেরই মুখে!

চতুর্থ সর্গ, "চির-পরাধিনী", বঙ্গ-সুন্দরী।

change in the outlook brought about by the parent movement in the West.

The present status of our women in the society is, then, chiefly due to a reactionary recognition, at first by a band of avowed social reformers, of their right to better treatment as sensible human beings ; and these reformers, it is to be noticed, were educated enough in English life and literature to receive the inspiration of liberty and equality from the movement that crystallised in England in 1760, particularly in that the direction of Elementary education for females. Women in Europe, it may be recalled, were not better off than their sisters in India in spite of their mediaeval tradition of chivalry. In the eighteenth century swift had made suggestions for reform in the Instruction of girls, though he had little belief in their capacity. Lady Mary Wortley Montague (1689-1762) recommended a generous course of instruction, including Arithmetic, Philosophy and Poetry even though she advised learned women to be artistic in concealing their intellectual attainments ; and Mrs. Montague, it may also be remembered, attempted a reform of manners by introducing parties "where the fair sex might participate in conversation with literary and ingenious men." During the first half of the last century and later still we had been repeating here what they in Great Britain did a century before to prepare the way for Mill and the positivistic school towards the extension and realisation of those privileges the effect of which we feel in our country to-day.

## II

What we have so far seen only brings us to conclude that the poet has set himself exclusively to the pursuit of love and beauty either in man or in nature. He is a loving friend in the first poem, *Bandhubiyoga*, a confirmed misanthrope in the next one, *Prema-prabāhini*, returning under an im-

Analysis of the poems just considered.

pulse partly from without and partly from within, to seek relief in an indwelling beauty in nature; a second-rate painter, apprenticed to English models, of the various aspects of nature in the third composition, *Nisarga-Sandarśan* though chronologically it appears to be the fourth; and in the last, as we have just noticed, a passionate opponent of the social ban so unjustly put on our womanhood so long.

All these presuppose a liberal outlook following on the humanizing influence of English education<sup>1</sup>, a

Summary. Romantic revolt<sup>2</sup> mainly English in its origin, against customs and tradi-

tions both in literature and in life, (and in this he was one of the pioneers), and a philosophy which is neither Eastern nor Western, but universal, and yet personal in its significance.

In spite of occasional promises which these poems have shown Bihārīlāl springs a surprise upon us

Sāradāmaṅgal with his *Sāradāmaṅgal* which, in artistic excellence and deep philo-

sophical import, is a remarkable piece of poetry, and is, as the poet himself says, the very life of his life<sup>3</sup>. It abounds in purple patches and in high lyrical thoughts. Taken as a whole, the poem gives us the impression of a beautiful dream, pleasant because it is seen in the twilight of the morning, and true because it is as deep as life. It is an expression of the inexpressible, an embodiment of the unbodied good, a permanence given in a very rare moment to the vision of that tremulous light in man, such as he beheld at the dawn of creation and is beholding even now.

1. Vide "পুরাতন প্রসঙ্গ" Pp. 164-166 by Krishnakamal Bhattachāryya.

2. Bihārīlāl is to us what crabbe and Cowper is to English literature. Nothing of the artificial school of poetry could find place in his genius. He put on record, as if under an indomitable impulse, what he saw, heard or felt himself—

Translated from the Bengalee criticism of K. Bhattachāryya, "Bhāratbarāṇa," Pousā, 1320 B. S.

3. সাক্ষাৎ আমার প্রাণ

'সারদামঙ্গল' গান etc—দীপেন্দ্র আমিন, নবম সর্গ, (২)

This vision assumed only a personal character in the early compositions of the poet under the discipleship of Shelley. It was then a fanciful phantom, at best a lovely apparition quick to rise and quicker still to dissolve. It remains even now an apparition but with an imaginative background woven out of the cosmic principle of life, and this universalization is the advance which the poet has gained here upon his former experience. Yet it is to be remembered that the poem wells out, above all, from his own self, from a background of the 'saddest thoughts' that the death of his wife and friends brought in its train for him. Cut off from love, from friendship and from wisdom, so the poet states in the *preface*, he had composed the first four verses which he set to music and sang himself. In the course of his song he saw the vision of the pre-Vālmiki age, the age of Vālmiki, and the age of Kālidāsa. The three types of intellectual beauty mingled together and reappeared in a new form against distinct landscapes beating, as it were, in mystic symphony with the spirit of the universe. But the poet had realised this abstract beauty in nature and in woman by an intimate spiritual fusion of his own tragic personality with it. And it is this personal experience that enabled the poet to make of this poem his masterpiece and to carve beautiful phrases out of his poetic quarry.

The true character of the Beauty in view has been powerfully described. It is, he says, the quintessence of Brahmā sparkling in eternal youth which throws into the shade the phenomenal grandeur or the *Māyā* of the universe. It is changeless, and yet apparently ever-changing in its myriad and multifold colours. It clothes the simple fact of matter with its native spiritual grace and enchanting beauty. It dwells within the spirit from which it watches the baffling shows of the world without. It is the rallying-

A description of  
his "Beauty."

point of the world of matter and the goal towards which the whole creation moves.

1. Out of the blue depths of Brahmā's mind rises the golden lotus which flowers into a thing of perfect plastic beauty. On this the young damsel, graceful as the full moon, places her lotus-like feet and smiles in her fluid charm—

*Sārādāmāṅgal* 1. 21.

2. Even so the lovely maiden from within the human mind casts the shadow of her own loveliness on the appearances of things—*Ibid*, 1. 23.

The notion of such an indwelling mystery in things is a matter of common knowledge for all mystics and philosophers. It appears *prima facie* to be an echo of Vaiṣṇava Vedantism, one of the most powerful currents of Bengali thought of the latter half of the last century ; one might also contend that its more mystical side inclines toward Platonism<sup>3</sup> suffused with the glow of a rich imagination as we find in Shelley. But neither it is Vedantism nor is it mere Platonism, but what it really is, as a poet's function would have it to be, is that it is an abstract principle common to both, concretised into a lovely form within the imaginative perception of man. Now, given these conditions, could any creative artist do better than carry his intellectual Beauty to the very dawn of creation when the first man of earth hailed the Holy light of Heaven rising out of chaos ? (verses 1-6). If the first Muse was born, as we find in Milton, on the

1. ব্রহ্মার মানস-সরে  
কুটে চল চল করে  
নীল জলে মনোহর সুবর্ণ নলিনী,  
পাদপদ্ম রাখি তায়  
হাসি হাসি ভাসি যায়  
বোড়শী রূপসী বামা পূর্ণিমা যামিনী। ২১, “সারাদামঙ্গল” ১ম সর্গ।
2. তেমতি মানস-সরে  
লাবণ্যদর্পণ ধরে  
দাঁড়য়ে লাবণ্যময়ী দেখিছেন মায়া। ২৩, “সারাদামঙ্গল” ১ম সর্গ।
3. Vide 3rd Section, verses 1-5.

secret top of Oreb or of Sinai, in Bihārīlā it descended on Vālmiki on the heights of the Himalayas, and her birth has been celebrated here by the introduction of the immortal legend of the *Krauncha* pair associated with the first and greatest poet of the world :

Perched, face to face, on the branch of a tree the *Krauncha* pair is in the fullness of conjugal bliss when the hunter's arrow surprises the male bird, and strikes him dead on the ground in his blood-stained plumes. Round the carcass of her lover the female *Krauncha* wings her way piping her dirge that fills the whole forest with its sad strains. The pathetic scene induces in the hermit a feeling of torpor which gives way to a paralysing fit of pity ; and on his forehead was seen, of a sudden, the radiant vision of the Muse like a flash of lightning on the blue sky.

The glorious flood of light—the light that is strange, that bathes the entire universe, that makes the sun pale into dimness—now shines on the hermit's brow ; and it is the light born of peace and not of the sun nor of the moon. Between the sorrowing bird and Vālmiki the new-born Muse alternates her frenzied looks; and then out of the depths of her pathos she sings her sad ditty to the slow tune of her tragic lyre. The melancholy strains set the trees and creepers a weeping, and the *Tamasā*, in her grief, overflows her banks with tears ; and the heart of the oldest of poets choked with feeling, is swept over with the bubbling stream of pity at the vision of the tragic Muse :<sup>1</sup> *Sārādāmangal*, 1st Canto.

1.

শাখি শাখে রস হুখে  
কৌঞ্চ কৌঞ্চী মুখে মুখে  
কতই সোহাগ করে বসি দুজনায়,  
হানিল শবরে বাণ  
নাশিল কৌঞ্চের শ্রাণ  
রুধিরে আগ্নুত পাখা ধরণী লুটায় !

১০

কৌঞ্চী প্রিয় সহচরে  
ঘেরে ঘেরে শোক করে  
অরণ্য পুরিল তার কাতর ক্রন্দনে ।  
চক্ষে করি দরশন  
জড়িমা-জড়িত মন,  
করণ-হৃদয় মুনি বিহ্বলের প্রায় ;  
সহসা ললাট ভাগে  
জ্যোতির্পরী কছা জাগে  
জাগিল বিজলী যেন নীল নবধনে ।

(continued)

The splendid artistic use made of this tragic incident against a romantic background is by itself sufficient to indicate the poet's philosophy<sup>1</sup> of love and beauty and of the philosophical basis as he conceived it for his poetry. The æsthetic emotion born of a sense of triumph of good over evil is the mother of the Muse, and the metaphysic of the emotion so stirred, opens the eyes of the poet to the perception of an inward harmony connecting the ego with the non-ego. The emotion in Valmiki is the

Pity as an efficient  
cause of Poetry.

১১

কিরণে কিরণময়  
বিচিত্র আলোকোদয়,  
স্মিয়মান রবিচ্ছবি, ভুবন উজলে ।  
চন্দ্র নয়, সূর্য্য নয়  
সমুজ্জ্বল শান্তিময়  
ঋষির ললাটে আজি না জানি কি ছলে ।

\* \* \* \*

১৬

একবার সে ক্রৌঞ্চিরে  
আর বার বাহ্মীকিরে  
নেহারেন ফিরে ফিরে যেন উন্মাদিনী ;  
কাতরা করুণাভরে  
গান সসকরণ স্বরে,  
ধীরে ধীরে বাজে করে বীণা বিবাদিনী ।

১৭

সে শোক-সঙ্গীত কথা  
শুনেন কাদে তরুলতা  
তমসা আকুল হয়ে কাদে উত্তরায় ।  
নিরখি নন্দিনীচ্ছবি  
গদ গদ আদি কবি  
অন্তরে করুণা সিন্ধু উথলিয়া ধায় ।

(“স্মারদামঙ্গল”, ১ম সর্গ) ।

১. “ভালবাসার সৃষ্টি করিয়া ঈশ্বর ভালই করিয়াছেন \* \* \* ভালবাসার চরম চরিতার্থতার স্থান এই বিশ্ব, \* \* \* নরনারীতে ভালবাসা প্রথম প্রস্ফুটিত হয়। তাহার স্বর্গীয় সৌরভ চিরদিন জীবনকে পরমানন্দময় করিয়া রাখে। ক্রমে ক্রমে সমস্ত বিশ্ব আপনার হইয়া যায়। এই অমায়িক আশ্রয়ভাব দেবদুর্লভ। ইহার নাম পরমার্থ, স্বার্থ নহে।”

১৫ই বৈশাখ, ১২৮৯ সাল, (The poet's letter to his friend Anāthbandhu Ray.)

tragic emotion of pity and, therefore, of love in the most comprehensive sense of the term. This, according to the poet, seems to be the genesis of poetry as derived by our study of the poem, and on this basis all theories of poetry, we believe, are bound to stand.

The more personal note of this poem, as of the older ones, lies in the game of hide-and-seek which this Beauty plays in the life of the poet whose heart beats in mystic sympathy with its appeal even amid the deadening facts of sensuous existence. Here, as we have said, is an echo of Platonism, the feeling of a rare call of Beauty as if seen in a previous life, evoked by the sight of something beautiful on earth—‘an echo of an antenatal dream’.<sup>1</sup> Nothing short of that ideal beauty which he chooses to name “sārādā” ever satisfies the poet, though he felt that that was beyond his reach, and hence the endless pursuit of that ‘one exceeding purpose’ adds only to the poignancy of his regret. To such a

3

Ah this face, this lovely face which speaks to me of a heavenly glory, where should I keep it ! For even this whole universe holds no spot for this treasure which would not let me so much as wink my eyes !

4

I see it always and yet I fancy that I have not seen it enough. It brings back to my mind the story of my previous birth, and sends to my heart now and then the piteous moans of some kindred soul from afar—Nisānta-Sangīt, *Śarat-kāl*.

৩

১. আহা এই মুখখানি  
প্রেম মাথা মুখখানি  
ত্রিলোক সৌন্দর্য্য আনি কে দিল আমায় ।  
কোথায় রাখিব বল,  
ত্রিভুবনে নাই স্থল  
নয়ন মুদিত নাহি চায় !

৪

সদাই দেখিরে ভাই  
তবু যেন দেখি নাই,  
যেন পূর্ব জন্মকথা জাগে মনে মনে ।  
অতি দূর দিগন্তরে  
কে যেন কাতর স্বরে  
কৈদে কৈদে উঠে কণে কণে ।  
নিশাক্ত সঙ্গীত, শরৎকাল



bereaved heart yet responsive to all sensuous impressions nature comes, as it does come to our poet<sup>1</sup>, with infinite lessons of comfort which serve to bring him round, in a truer spirit, to the love of humanity. A similar position was reached by our poet when, in disappointment, he goes to the Himalayas of which he gives a description of rare vigour in our poetry : The intimations of nature—the awe-inspiring spectacle of the endless ranges in their defiant height, the wanton waves of storms resounding in the hills like the cymbals of Rudra, the infinite stretches of ice variegated with rainbow hues, the sportive antelopes, the impenetrable source of the Ganges breaking in upon the valleys as if the lunar spheres have cracked and rushed down upon the earth—these transport him to a heaven of which, he finds, the other side is home.<sup>2</sup> The Ganges which takes him to another region sends him back to his own world a fresher and greater man. This is what is called the mingling of heaven and earth in poetry.

The last stanza of the poem, rightly entitled *Śānti*, appears to be addressed to his wife.<sup>3</sup> This is peace wrested from experience in the dark night of the soul. Through that conjugal felicity he now finds the key to his perplexing problem—the problem of the discovery of the highest excellence in man. He makes of her the only prop of his life, and so while he says, he reminds us of

One hope within two wills, one will beneath  
Two overshadowing minds, one life, one death,  
One Heaven, one Hell, one immortality,  
And one annihilation.—Shelley, "Epipsychidion" 584-587.

1. See "গীতি", চতুর্থ সর্গ, সারদামঙ্গল, cf. also Rabindranath's মানস-হুল্লরী ।

2. See পঞ্চম সর্গ, V, 12.

3. "তিনি (বিহারীলাল) যে বেশ সন্তোষের সহিত সংসার যাত্রা নির্বাহ করিতেন, এবং অস্বস্তি সহ্যক্ষমিত গৃহিনীপণ্য গুণে যে তাঁহার সংসারে নিরবচ্ছিন্ন শান্তি বিরাজ করিত, তাহা তাঁহার 'সারদামঙ্গলের' উপহারে 'শান্তি' গীতিতে ফুটি পাইতেছে। "ঋষি হুকবি বিহারীলাল" by ৬২২২ লাহা, ১৩২১ সাল

I lose my hunger and thirst in meditating on thee, and my heart and eyes always hang upon thee, for thou art my Laksmī and Saraswati, and I am the lord of the universe, and I leave this world to whomsoever it pleases.<sup>1</sup>

Giti Sārādāmāṅgal.

### III

Even he who runs may read that Bihārīlāl, like Shelley, is pre-eminently a love and beauty mystic<sup>2</sup>.

Bihārīlāl as a love  
and beauty mystic.

To love and live is one to him. He takes, as we have already seen, a very serious view of his love's philosophy. Dalliance with it, such as we find in what is popularly called 'Platonic love', moves him to indignation, and herein lies his discriminating conception of *Rasa*, the essential ingredient of poetry.

Cursed be that feeble and false note of love that masquerades as "Platonic". But the great heart that has true love soars in the blue of existence and sings like the night-ingle with full-throated ease<sup>3</sup>—Niśīta Saṅgīt. 31, *Sārathāl*.

1.

কুখ্য তুচ্ছা দূরে রাখি

ভোর হয়ে বসে থাকি

নয়ন পরাণ ভোরে দেখি অনিবার !—

তোমায় দেখি অনিবার ।

তুমি লক্ষ্মী সরস্বতী

আমি ব্রহ্মাণ্ডের পতি

হোক গে এ বহুমতী যার খুসী তার !—গীতি, সারাদামঙ্গল ।

2. আধুনিক বঙ্গসাহিত্যে প্রেমের সঙ্গীত এরূপ সহস্রধারে উৎসের মত কোথাও উৎসারিত হয় নাই".....—রবীন্দ্রনাথ ঠাকুর, "সাধনা," আষাঢ়, ১৩০১ সাল ।

3.

ধিক রে অধম ধিক্

ভালবাসা "প্লেটোনিক্"

ছদ্মবেশী রসিক মধুর "মিয়ু মিয়ু",

প্রেমের দরাজ জান

আকাশে ঢালিয়া প্রাণ

সজোরে পাণিয়া হাঁকে ' গীহ গীহ গীহ'—নিশীথসঙ্গীত ৩১,  
শরৎকাল ।

Behind all his poetry there is this rich conception of selfless love. Love which was first a social instinct assumes now a unifying spiritual power. He sees the beauty and delight of all things illumined by the wonder of the secret spiritual self. Hence his high reverence for woman and his plea for reform—

Love as a unifying power.

Certainly, there is in this world a great feminine power that conquereth the universe, that findeth for man the jewel of his soul. That is my four heavens and all that I need is only love<sup>1</sup>—"Bāul Bimśati,"<sup>6</sup>

Everywhere Bihārīlāl is a seer and worshipper of the supreme power that dwells in things ; of the love that binds man to an awful deity and to one another. Throughout his life he has pursued the shadow of that presence oftener with disappointment but at last with success ; in the vast book of nature but really in the heart of man ; in the intense inanity of a *Nirbiḥkalpa Brahmā* but more conceivably in the free divine sports of a *Nārāyana*.<sup>2</sup>

Vision of the Supreme power, immanent and transcendent.

The poet's later work, naturally more compact in the firmer grasp of the unity of his spirit, defies an accurate analysis. He certainly outgrows here the discipleship of his English masters, and develops almost a hatred<sup>3</sup> for borrowing. He not only makes the garb of his poetry thoroughly Indian ; but also exploits, as it were, an apparently vendantic vaiṣṇavism to explain the enigma of phenomenal changes and the position of a directive or purposive power realising itself in man and nature ; and he quotes a hymn

Return to Orientalism.

1. আছে, বিশ্বজয়ী—শক্তিময়ী নারী এ ধরায়,  
তাই নরে নিধি পায় ;  
আমার সেই-ই স্বর্গ চতুর্দর্শ ; ধারি কেবল প্রেমের ধার ।

বাউল বিংশতি ৬ ।

2. See "সাধের আসন", চতুর্থ সর্গ, ২০-২৪ ।
3. See "শরৎকাল"—নিশীথ-সঙ্গীত, ১৪-১৬ ।

from *Mārkaṇḍeya Chandi* to buttress his mystic attitude<sup>1</sup> to the spiritual grace in things as a reflection of the one all-pervading Mother of the universe.

But, with all his transformed outlook, the question remains whether Bihārīlāl managed to forget his old English lessons altogether. The answer is that the mature poet thrust his old allegiance into the back-

Western influence  
thrust into the back-  
ground.

ground of his thought, and it moved him from there: For what can yet explain the sustained ethereality of the spiritual pursuit of the poet as a passionate dualist; its lyrical rhythm with its psychological subtleties, or again its reassuring realism? Is it not hard to say if the opening twilight scene of *Sārādāmāṅgal* be thought quite independent of Shelleyan mysticism? Is not the poem a soul-drama, though of the poet himself and if so, is the conception entirely Bihārīlāl's own? Who gave an all-comprehensiveness to his intellectual outlook, that sweetness and attractive poignancy to his self-creating inmost soul, which makes of life its epic, its drama and its lyric, and which constantly re-sees and re-shapes the beauty and delight of the spirit in thought, by the plastic stress and power of the poet's thinking?

To answer all these pertinent queries is to break into the heart of the problem set forth at the outset;

A summary of con-  
clusions.

in other words, to explain the historical and literary implications of Western influence which the preceding pages have sought to illustrate with special reference to the four major poets of the century. History records the profound change in our mental outlook which the British conquest of India has made possible—the change that has led us to believe in the 'Open Road' in religion, in education, in politics, and to question, if necessary, the smuggest institution, or to look askance at the most ancient habit. The spirit of discovery has been awakened in us, and the

1. See "সাধের আসন," ১ম সর্গ, "মাধুরী"।

truth, we know, must be attained whether by 'the open Road' or through the beaten path. Lastly, in a far greater variety of strains may be observed, in our literature, the revival of the same ardent intellectual curiosity and the genius for metaphysical conquest which enables us to combine foreign ideas into new accords, and organise them in their appropriate symphony.

Of this legacy of foreign influence in our literature Bihārīlāl is one of the earliest inheritors ; for to him was given, to adapt an epigram of Flaubert, the great privilege of the conquest of the air in our poetry. In his *solo* flight he saw the vision of the Supreme power which stands behind, beyond, and within the passing flux of immediate things, and which is the ultimate ideal and the hopeless quest of all poets and philosophers. And if he apprehended the presence of the beautiful both on land and in the air, it was only because of the osmotic pressure of western culture which provided in the last century both *incentive* and *material* to the Odyssey of our national spirit for adventures of thought, of passionate feeling and æsthetic experience.

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